

Designer's Notes: GURPS Cops

The Job Isn't What You Think It Is

by Lisa J. Steele

We see police every day, but we don't really know what they do. There's almost no gaming material about cops as player characters, or for that matter about cops as adversaries. What we see in movies and TV is more fantasy than fact -- but, in the absence of better information, it's what we tend to fall back on.

I, however, work on criminal appeals. I read about a dozen trial transcripts every year, mostly in homicide cases, and I see actual police reports and testimony. I've seen the crime-scene photos, talked to clients on death row, talked to the detectives, the prosecutors, and the experts. Often, as I read, I play detective -- looking at how the investigation was done, and trying to decide in my own mind whether I think it was done right. I've had to learn a fair amount about forensic evidence, autopsies, and crime-scene handling. Hollywood, even the based-on-reality movies and shows, cuts lots of corners for dramatic purposes.

Such thoughts led me to what I think of as the heart of the book: the "How to Solve a Crime" chapter. Solving, stopping, or escaping being framed for a crime is one of the all-time classic plots -- but it's surprisingly hard to pull off in a game. You probably know to look for means, motive, and opportunity. You probably know about fingerprints, blood types, and ballistics. You probably know, thanks to Hollywood, how to play "good cop/bad cop." But to really solve a crime -- or even to do so in a cinematic yet satisfying manner -- takes a lot more than that. How do you question a witness? How do you interrogate a suspect? What should you look for at the crime scene? What should you listen for from the Game Master? And, if you are the GM, what should you give your players?

"The Station House" is about pacing, locations, plots, and police departments. There are fundamental rules for setting up a mystery that aren't intuitively obvious. There are also differences between the classic puzzle-box plot (where the PCs get the clues and red herrings mixed together in no particular order) and the ball-of-twine plot (where the PCs get led from scene to scene through the investigation). Certain locations in a police station are typical sites for classic scenes -- the interrogation, the evidence room, the crime lab. The locations, and ideas for how to use them, are also in this chapter.

Cops need robbers. "Criminals" is about crooks from a cop's view. It's about the essence of criminal defense law. And it is about problem solving. Being a cop isn't just about being a crack shot and an ace driver. It's about people -- often, good people seen at their very worst. It's about everything from barking dog calls to serial murders, from drug addicts to white-collar criminals.

"Putting Them Away" was a hard chapter to write. It deals with trials and prisons. It is hard to simplify the nuances of my job. But what a player and a GM need to know to handle a hearing, a trial, or a prison campaign isn't what I do for a living. You might need to know about bail and about bounty hunters. You might need to know about how plea agreements work and how illegal evidence gets suppressed. You might need to know the seven most important concepts about evidence. You might need to know about prisons, probation, and parole.

What else is in the book? There is character creation -- advantages, disadvantages, skills discussed as they apply to police work. There are lists of standard equipment from the uniform to the police cruiser. There's a discussion of the history of policing and profiles of some famous or typical officers. There's a quick discussion of some typical law-enforcement agencies from the LAPD and the NYPD to the FBI, to police departments in England, France, Japan, and the former East Germany.

What's The Book About?

Cops is about being lied to. Cops say there's something about the color blue that makes everyone from a nun caught speeding to an eyewitness that doesn't want to be involved tell boldfaced lies to an officer's face. It's about being yelled at, thrown up on, hit, bit, and kicked -- and still expected to act professionally. It's about "street justice" and about excessive force. It's about the "Thin Blue Line," the "Blue Wall of Silence," and the "World's Biggest Boy's Club."

Cops is about legal use of lethal force. I have a license to carry a firearm in my home state. I represent people who have done foolish, impulsive, or wicked things with firearms. I've seen the autopsy pictures, the crime scene photos, and held bullets recovered from corpses. Cinematic cops, and characters in cinematic games, get to blaze away with firearms with abandon. You can do that with **Cops**. You can also deal with a dramatic reality where Internal Affairs and prosecutors will investigate every questionable gunshot. Where there are consequences when player characters fire away at the bad guy on a crowded city street.

Cops is about alternatives to deadly force -- pepper spray, tear gas, bean-bag rounds, rubber bullets, and tasers. It gives characters options for self-defense that doesn't mean the characters risk facing murder charges, or kill the NPC the GM needs to keep alive until he gives them an important clue.

Cops is about jail. Getting yourself or an NPC into or out of jail is another classic plot. Not surprisingly, prisons are very reluctant to talk about their layout and security measures. But there are some ideas for realistic weak spots for players trying to brainstorm a jailbreak and or for a GM looking for a caper the PCs can thwart. I visit prisons about once a month. The sound of a heavy steel door rolling shut makes the same sound you hear on television, but it feels very different when you are inside that door about to sit down for the first time with a guy facing lethal injection or doing 100 years for a gang killing. And it's very different for that guy as he's arrested, strip searched, cavity searched, issued his prison clothes, and sent to his cell for his first night behind bars.

And, of course, **Cops** is about cops. The police are everywhere. Almost every game world has someone powerful who wants to keep order. (And the players trying to undermine it, as often as not.) That makes the question of who enforces that order, what they do, and why they do it nearly universal. The players may want to play the enforcers -- or the GM may want to bring the enforcers down on them. Whether they're called the Space Patrol or the Anointed Guardians of the True Faith, they're still going to look out for each other, close ranks against outsiders, and bust the perps.

The Cult of Asklepios

By Dan Howard

*"I start to sing of Asklepios, healer of ills,
Apollo's son, the one divine Koronis bore
in the Dotian field, King Phlegyas' girl,
a great delight to people, soothing evil pangs.*

"So hail to Thee, Lord; I beseech Thee with my song."
-- Homeric Hymn

Introduction

What do PCs do when they are struck down with illness or injury? In a fantasy world they simply make a trip to the nearest temple, offer the priest a handful of coins, and they are healed. In a medieval setting they would take their chances with the local barber or wisewoman. Either way this process is usually a very minor part of the campaign. This article is an attempt to expand upon the healing aspect of roleplaying campaigns.

There are countless examples of healing cults throughout history and the tapestry of the GM's game world becomes more richly embroidered with the inclusion of some of these. Historically the cult of Asklepios was the largest of these cults in the ancient world. The Cult of Asklepios can be slotted into any campaign. It has been kept as general as possible to allow use with any game system. Any low-tech setting from high fantasy to ancient Rome or Greece would be appropriate. In a pantheistic world (such as ancient Greece), Asklepios would be openly and widely worshipped. In a culture that doesn't tolerate other religions (such as Christian Europe), the cult of Asklepios would either be a secretive and small organisation, or else the pagan god would be replaced with a respectable patron saint, and rituals and medical practice would continue with minimal interruption.

Asklepios

From the time of Homer down to the reign of Constantine, the prominent figure associated with healing in the ancient world was Asklepios, or Aesculapius as he was known to the Romans. He was revered as a divinely inspired physician and the founder of the medical profession. Mortal, like Herakles (Hercules), Asklepios became a god because of his services to mankind.

In Greek mythology he was the son of the god Apollo and the nymph Koronis, a princess of Thessaly. Angry because Koronis was unfaithful to him, Apollo killed her and took his infant son to the centaur Chiron to be raised. Asklepios learned all that Chiron knew about the art of healing and soon became a great physician. As an adult he became so skilled in surgery and the use of medicinal plants that he could even restore the dead to life. Hades, ruler of the dead, became alarmed at this and complained to Zeus, who, fearing that Asklepios might render all men immortal, killed him. Among his children the best known are his daughters Hygeia ("health") and Panacea ("all-healing") who are also associated with medicine.

Priests, called Asklepiads or Asclepiadae, were supposedly descended from Asklepios himself, hence the term. It seems likely that Asklepiads were initially a clan group with blood links to Asklepios and their skills were passed down from one generation to the next within the family group. Over time the term was expanded upon to designate all medical practitioners in general.

Sanctuaries

Beginning in the sixth century BC, health resorts, or sanctuaries, known as Asklepia sprang up all over the Mediterranean. These sanctuaries, such as those at Epidauros, Tricca, Kos and Pergamon, were built outside the towns on particularly healthy sites, where the sick and injured would come to worship and seek cures for their ills. Harmless serpents were kept in these temples of healing, supposedly tended by Hygeia. Snakes were held sacred by Asklepios and he was thought to sometimes appear in the form of a snake. Patients who saw snakes in their dreams believed that the god of healing himself had come to their aid.

There were two main types of sanctuary, depending upon which type of medicine was being practised. The original kind was completely mystical in orientation. It involved the patient offering a sacrifice to Asklepios and then going to sleep in the temple. During this sleep Asklepios would either intervene directly and heal the suppliant, or appear in a dream and give instructions on how to be healed. The second, and later type of Asklepia, was founded upon Hippocratic principles and more closely resembled modern surgical hospitals.

Depending upon the game world, either of these types could be employed. In a world where the gods take a physical role, the former mystical type would be prominent. While the patient slept Asklepios or one of his daughters would appear in their material form, or through his agents, the serpents, and perform some act to heal the patient.

There are many examples of divine intervention in Greek incursions found at Asklepia ruins. A sacred snake licking a patient's eyes thus curing him of blindness. A warrior with a serious arrow wound dreams of Asklepios operating on him. He wakes up to find his injury healed and the arrowhead in his hand. A woman's disease was cured when she dreamt of Hygeia covering her affliction with a poultice.

Alternatively, Asklepios would appear to the patient in a dream and give advice. In the morning the priests would interpret the dream and explain the god's precepts.

A simple Asklepia of the mystical type would include three buildings: the Thymele or Tholos, where the purification ritual would take place; nearby would be the Temple of Asklepios, which would include a statue of the god and an altar for offering sacrifices; attached to this would be the Enkoimeterion or Abaton, a dormitory where people would lay down on pallets to sleep and await the cure of the god. These were all located within a sacred grove marked out by boundary stones. In order to maintain the purity of the grove, no birth or death could take place within the perimeter. Larger Asklepia would have many other buildings including separate structures for the temple and altar; temples to other gods, like Apollo; staff quarters; a gymnasium; public baths; and a guesthouse for people who came to worship the god but did not require healing. Instead of boundary markers, the sanctuary may have been surrounded by a wall. An excellent example of a mystical type of sanctuary was found at a city called Epidauros.

Alternatively, in a world where the gods are benign, the surgical Asklepia would be more prominent and priests would also be physicians who took an active part in healing the patient. In this case other buildings were also required, and located just outside the sacred boundary markers. These included surgical theatres, sickrooms, birthing chambers and apothecaries. An excellent example of this type has been found on the isle of Kos where Hippocrates, himself, was commonly believed to have practiced.

Ritual

"Do dreams cause a concern for man to be attributed to the gods or does the god's care for man cause him to be saved through dreams?"

-- Aelius Aristides

Arrival

A suppliant to either type of Asklepia would undergo similar rituals prior to being healed. Sometimes they were required to camp outside and fast for a certain period of time before being permitted entry. If this sanctuary was located just outside a city, then this time could be spent in comfort in a local inn. Larger Asklepia had specially built guesthouses to accommodate large numbers of visitors.

Purification

Upon entering, the suppliant must purify himself (or herself) through ritual bathing in the sacred waters. This would either be a natural spring or a specifically constructed well around which the tholos was erected. After bathing a white garment was donned. There were simple prayers and choral hymns, which were accompanied by musical instruments, and often composed by the suppliants themselves.

Worship

Once purified, the suppliant proceeded to the temple to beseech the god for assistance. Asklepios was usually depicted in one of two ways. Either as a bearded man, standing, dressed in a long cloak, with bare breast, and holding his symbol -- a knotted wooden staff around which a mystical snake was coiled. Otherwise he was depicted sitting on a throne grasping his staff in one hand and his other hand above the head of a serpent. A dog was occasionally lying at his feet.

The staff of Asklepios became the traditional symbol of medicine. Note that the caduceus, with its winged staff and intertwined serpents, frequently used today as a medical emblem, has no medical relevance. It represents the wand of Hermes, or Mercury, the messenger of the gods and the patron of merchants and thieves.

The snake wrapped around the Asklepiian staff may also have had more than merely symbolic value. Snakes tied to a stick may have been a way of inoculating patients with nonlethal doses of snake venom -- a primitive hypodermic injection device. There is little evidence to support this theory however.

Sacrifice

The altar is sometimes located within the temple and sometimes outside in the open. Contrary to most Greek gods, Asklepios seems to have been satisfied by bloodless sacrifices. Bread, cakes, eggs, wine, fruit, or gold and silver crowns, etc. were either placed on the altar or ritually burnt. Votive offerings were also common, many of which were representations of the diseased part of the body. The more wealthy the suppliant, the more valuable the offering that was expected. How effective a PC's offering is should be determined by the GM. Two things need to be taken into account: the wealth of the PC, and the severity of the injury or illness. The god would be far more receptive to a poor farmer who offered half of his entire harvest than to a wealthy adventurer who offered a similar amount in gold. Try and encourage the PCs to determine their own offering rather than providing a fixed "price." Imaginative offerings should be rewarded, even if their monetary value is lower. If the PC put a lot of effort into composing his hymn then this should also contribute towards a favourable result.

Incubation

After offering sacrifices and prayers the suppliant goes to sleep. This process of "sleeping in" is called enkoimesis, or incubatio. The patient goes to the abaton and lies down on a pallet. The temple warden extinguishes the lights and tells the incubants to go to sleep and keep quiet. In smaller Asklepia there would be no abaton and the patients would sleep in the temple itself. Imagine the patient lying there in total darkness listening to the soft padding of the warden's feet, the trickle of the sacred spring nearby, and the almost imperceptible slither and rustling of the sacred snakes. If Asklepios was favourable the patient would either be healed during the night or the god would appear to him in a dream, sometimes both.

Morning

In the morning, if the patient wasn't healed directly, a priest would interpret the suppliants' dreams. Dreams are used both as a means of diagnosis and a mechanism for determining a cure. If the suppliant was in a mystical Asklepia, he would now be required to thank the god and leave. This thanks usually involved either tossing coins into the sacred well or by hanging ex-votos on the walls of the temple. The cure prescribed to him could include bathing in the sea or

river during winter, taking medicinal herbs, fasting, or strenuous exercise (sometimes during the heat of summer). Sometimes a specific task needed to be performed.

If the suppliant was in a surgical type of Asklepia, he would be required to stay so that the priests could attempt to cure him. This could involve anything from surgical operations, to setting a broken bone and applying a poultice, to medicinal cures concocted in the local apothecary. Beds were available for the patient to recover.

If the god was not favourable the suppliant may be given a penance to complete before being considered worthy to present himself to Asklepios a second time. This is a good opportunity for the GM to insert quests and adventures that may be relevant to his overall campaign.

Conclusion

Hopefully this has widened the scope of possible avenues of healing in a GM's game world. No longer can the players rock up to the local temple, toss a few coins at the feet of the nearest priest, get some quick laying on hands, and be back at the taven in time for the next round of ale. If treated with the proper reverence, the Cult of Asklepios can be a powerful ally. Making an enemy out of Asklepios is unwise (a couple of failed disease resistance rolls will teach the proper respect). The search for the legendary healing cult may become the central focus of the campaign itself. A PC inclined towards healing may be a priest of Asklepios. His skills would range from theology to surgery and he would be respected throughout the ancient world -- until an influential patient died that is. Healers often had to flee for their lives from vengeful relatives. Whether good or ill, the world becomes more interesting if Asklepios is a part of it.

Pyramid Review

At Your Service (for Over the Edge)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by **Keith Baker, Robert "Doc" Cross, Brian Joughin, Neil Laughlin, Lee Moyer, John Nephew, Michelle A. Nephew Brown & John Spey**

Illustrated by **Lee Moyer & C. Brent Ferguson**

112 pages; \$19.95

It has been a while since the last release for *Over The Edge*, Atlas Games' modern day RPG of secrets and conspiracies, magic and science fiction, all blended into a surreal whole. So the publication of *At Your Service*, a new supplement describing some three-dozen businesses and locations across the tiny Mediterranean island state of Al-Amarja -- the setting for *Over The Edge* -- should be a welcome sight for fans of the game.

There are exactly thirty-six entries in *At Your Service*, some no more than a page long, others as long as ten or even eighteen pages, with most running to two or three pages in length. The book is light on art, but what there is -- all by Lee Moyer and C. Brent Ferguson -- is both good and captures the feel of the location or person each illustrates. Lee Moyer, in addition to the cover, also provides a logo or business card for each of the entries, and while many lose a little in resolution, it would be nice if Atlas Games were to make them all available as a download from their website. One final complaint is the fragility of the cover -- after only a few days use, the laminate giving the book's cover its glossy finish is beginning to peel. (Unfortunately, my copy of *At Your Service* is not my only Atlas Games book that this has happened to . . .)

Each entry opens with a one-line description of the business or location, its reputation (if any), and a short description encapsulating the site, including whatever secrets it may hold. Each establishment's address is also given. The main body of the text builds upon the short opening description and is followed by details of any GMC (Game Master Character) pertinent to the location. The entry is rounded out with story ideas to get the players involved in the site and anyone to be found there.

[SPOILER ALERT]

The largest entry in the book is The Rose Hotel by Keith Baker and Lee Moyer, which describes a weird time-locked hotel located inside the head of an old bag lady. Street ladies with strange powers are far from original, but the authors have given it an Al-Amarjan twist. The hotel is part of her subconscious, and while getting in is easy, getting out is something of a challenge. A range of people from the last eighty years populates the hotel, with the most active eager for news of the present and even for the books the newcomer might have been carrying when they were entrapped. Then there is the strangely polite Midwich family of children to be found on the fifth floor. Rumour has it, that they know a way out of The Rose Hotel, but why is it that all of the adults avoid them? This location easily provides a mini-adventure in itself, as plenty of individuals and plots are given for the players to interact with and the GM is free to add their own.

Pride of place in *At Your Service* goes to The Cali Dump, a small and relatively peaceful neighborhood in the rundown Great Men Barrio. It is not easy to get to, as cabs tend to avoid going into the area. Drivers will relate how objects and even people have been ripped from their cab to be left behind in The Cali Dump. For those in the know, the whole



area is home to large number of spirits, none of whom can actually leave. Dominating these spirits and thus the streets of The Cali Dump is a quartet of spirits or sticks, "The Cali Loa." They are very protective of their small domain and even aid the local gang, The Drogues, against incursions by the Great Lords, a satanic gang from the surrounding Great Men Barrio. The Loa have their own agenda and may even employ the Players, who in return can learn to call upon their aid.

Besides the actual description of The Cali Dump itself, there are another thirteen entries in *At Your Service*, which can actually be found within the three streets of the neighborhood. In fact, there are no other establishments described in the book taken from the Great Men Barrio. These can include services like Johnson's Divinations, where any question can be asked for a price; Pike's Diner in which the hostess and her guests discourage the purchase of meals; components for both black and white magic are available at Hell in a Handbasket and Beautiful Day, respectively, whilst Veve can supply any Vodou or Santeria items the players might need.

After learning of his secret activities as a "Cut-Ups" operative in the previous *Over The Edge* supplement, *Weather The Cuckoo Likes*, "Doc" Cross describes his latest recruits at the amusingly named "You'll Rot Your Mind Reading That!" This is the island's best-known comics and games shop, which brings in a range of customers, many of whom are movers and shakers in the various Al-Amarjan conspiracies.

If the players ever feel guilty about their activities, they can get it all of their chests at Deadly Confessions, where counsellor will ensure that they feel so much better after they leave. Player characters that like to roleplay as their hobby can enjoy a LARP session at The Haunted House, Al-Amarja's hottest new re-enactment venue, where the blood is fake, but the horror is not. And if your no-doubt oddball players wonder how the other half live, then they can view the living museum, Norms, a nightclub hosted by a real American couple leading an ultra-normal day-to-day existence!

The only entry that has been reprinted is John Nephew's Fleur de Lys Investments, Ltd., originally seen *Pyramid* #6. For fans of all things Harry Potter, this is an interesting take on the Philosopher's Stone, which of course, reveals the truth about a pair of financial consultants.

[END SPOILERS]

At Your Service is rounded out with a pair of indices. The first lists each of the GMCs in alphabetical order. The second breaks the list of establishments down by barrio or neighborhood in which they are each located. Perhaps a third could have been added listing the various businesses by type, but the two here are more than serviceable.

Further, Atlas Games suggests that the book is not just useful for *Over The Edge*, but a "gold mine of ideas for any modern game setting involving the unusual and supernatural." Pleasingly, this is a fair claim, as many of the entries in *At Your Service* could be used in many other modern set RPGs. The most obvious of these is *Unknown Armies*, Atlas Games' own RPG of modern day pulp action magic, and *Feng Shui*, their game of Hong Kong action, as well as Eden Studio's *Witchcraft*. Of course, you would have to tone down or excise the science fiction elements as necessary, but likewise, it would be necessary to play down the more outré elements if you were using some of these locations for Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green* or Hogshead's *SLA Industries*.

At Your Service should provide a welcome shot in the arm to any *Over The Edge* game, and there is bound to be more than just something that the GM can add to their campaign in this book. Yet referees for other games looking for a selection of interesting locations, businesses and NPCs should at least take a browse through *At Your Service*.

-- Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Mystic Warriors (for d20)

Written by **Doug Herring, Andrew Thompson, Kenny Lewis, John Kubisz**

Published by [Mystic Eye Games](#)

128 b&w pages; \$14.95

Mystic Warriors not only brings over twenty new prestige classes, each with their own background and special abilities, but also introduces vitus and techniques to the **d20** system. Vitus is similar to chi or the Force in that it's an energy that everyone has, but few are able to channel. The Mystic Warriors of the book, different prestige classes, are all trained in the use and handling of vitus to augment their abilities.

Vitus is a point-based score that varies depending on the characters class, his level and some key statistics, which vary according to class. Vitus is used to fuel special powers. One of the nice things about *Mystic Warriors* is that it acknowledges that vitus might be easier handled by using subdual damage on hit points instead of vitus points, or for those who don't like the idea of vitus at all, ignore it and the techniques it fuels. One of these options should fit almost any type of campaign.

The prestige classes suffer numerous roleplaying drawbacks and some minor game ones. If the GM isn't at the top of her game, the players may quickly flock to these character classes in hopes of easy power without restrictions.

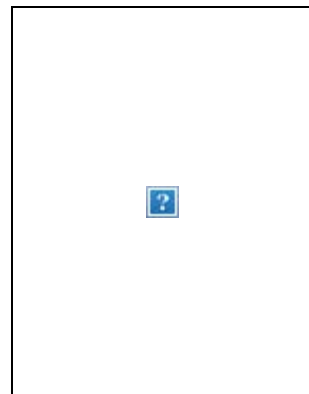
Each school starts with the name, and the country of origin, which includes the location for the campaign the "Rise of Evil," and a generic location. The requirements often include alignment, base attack bonus, a certain number of ranks in harness vitus, and other skills, as well as feats, ability scores, and any special restrictions. These are followed by the class skills, skill points at each level, the formula for determining how many vitus points the character gains per level, and the hit die.

After that block of information is passed, the description of the class is given along with strictures. These strictures often take roleplaying into effect as in many portions of the The Hunt setting. The weapons and armor proficiency block shows what skills the character gains, as well as details the powers that the character gains per level. Each class comes with two tables, a standard table with the level, attack bonus, saving throws and powers by level, as well as a technique table that shows how many techniques the character has mastered. Each section concludes with a short story illustrating how the characters interact with their environment.

There is a wide variety of classes to choose from, and most who are looking to augment their warriors should easily be able to find at least one prestige class to add to their warriors. Some of the classes have a slight edge to them in another direction from warrior, like the Guild of the Dancing Knife. These knife fighters are more like thieves that are highly specialized with knives. On the other hand, the Brotherhood of the Sparrow Hawk is the perfect thief-catcher.

Some of these classes would probably be better off as antagonists for the players. Members of the Cult of Madness are insane warriors, while Shiva's Chosen are non-good warriors who seek out powerful individuals to kill in order to gain the attention of their god.

Now the techniques are special abilities that the character can select. There are some techniques that only certain classes can take, and the technique lists goes from 1st to 5th level. Some of the first level techniques include ability boost, which augments physical abilities in exchange for vitus, to doom strike, which charges a weapon with killing



power unless the struck victim makes a fortitude save.

In addition to vitus, techniques, and new prestige classes, there are also new items and new feats. The feats include general, mystic warrior only, item creation, and fighting stance. The fighting stances give the character different bonuses depending on the feat.

The book wraps up with an appendix that details more specifics about several of the prestige classes and an NPC write up. Other information included is the official academy name, other names, leadership/organization, current leader and level of secrecy. The level of secrecy is an important aspect since the dominating religion of The Hunt campaign setting looks down upon the Mystic Warriors.

Most of the art is considerably better than in previous books. Jason Smith brings a true level of professionalism to Mystic Eye Games that many found were lacking in previous products. Still, there are some cases where a prestige class has two illustrations: a powerful one, and an okay one. If the okay art was removed and the tables minimized, the book could've come in at 112 pages and still been a bargain at \$14.95. The sharper art would have given the book a better overall feel instead of a beefier feel.

GMs looking to expand their knowledge of The Hunt Campaign world, or those interested in expanding their home campaigns with vitus and techniques, will find this book useful. Players looking for warrior-based prestige classes should be able to find at least one or two in the pages of this book. At \$14.95, the book is a bargain.

Web Sites

- <http://www.mysticeyegames.com/NewFiles/Sparrow%20Hawk%20page.jpg> -- Preview from *Mystic Warriors*
- <http://www.d20reviews.com/downloads.htm> -- Bonus prestige class and facing rules for *d20*

--Joe G. Kushner

Random Thoughts On Lord of the Rings

Greetings, Pyramidkateers! Welcome to the new year, and the last palindromatic year for 110 years.

But first, a caveat. I'm sicker than a dawg currently, so if this week's installment doesn't make any sense . . . well, I'm content to blame the tiny beings that have invaded my bloodstream (despite previous nonsensical installments crafted while entirely healthy).

Having seen *Lord of the Rings* on Sunday, I thought I'd take a column to share my random thoughts on the film. (Various spoiler warnings; if you haven't read the books, seen the movie, or eaten the Fruit Roll-Ups, you may want to give this column a skip.)

* * *

As a caveat, I feel I should point out that I have not, in fact, read the trilogy. Invariably whenever I say this I get gasps of disbelief, and an occasional stone or two hucked at me. But whenever I say that I've started to read it -- only to get caught up in dozens of pages of troop movements, Welch-y Elvish, or incomprehensible historical material -- many of these same folks have also said, "Yeah; those are pretty boring bits. You should skip those the first time." This makes the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy perhaps the most beloved series where its fans think you should specifically avoid reading certain points.

(As an aside, I should point out that I have read *The Hobbit*, and -- although it has been many years -- I recall enjoying it.)

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One of the interesting things I walked away from the movie with is the realization that our heroes spent an inordinate amount of time running away (complete with all the *Monty Python & The Holy Grail* references that sparked within me). I kept expecting the heroes to kick butt and take names during most combat scenes, but for the most part they were so outnumbered or outgunned that their only rational option was to flee.

Now, in the past I've discussed the folly of [providing appropriate challenges](#), but this phenomenon sparked a new idea. Namely, how did the heroes *know* when they should run, or when they should stay and fight?

And so in my next campaign I've decided to try an idea I've dabbled in before, but never fully manifested. I'll allow those with sufficient martial ability to "size up" the battlefield situation, and roll to determine their chances. This would be in general terms like, "Piece of cake," or "Even up," or "No shot in heck." A failed roll would give no or false information, and the result would be modified based on appropriate advantages or disadvantages, like Overconfidence or Combat Reflexes. (One of my favorite continuing jokes in the *Vampire: The Dark Ages* campaign was -- no matter what kind of opposition our party faced -- having my overconfident character say, "Hmm . . . I think we can take them.")

Some games make this easier than others; *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*, for example, specifically has a Challenge Rating that should make it easy to give an idea of relative opposition level. And point-based systems would enable me to compare relative point totals as a ballpark figure. (Of course, I'd need to make sure that I only counted things the heroes could reasonably see; a dozen orcs in the same room as an invisible dragon would lead to a different conclusion than if the dragon were in plain sight . . .)

But in this way I could throw wildly challenging obstacles at the heroes, without fear that they'll necessarily rush lemming-like to their deaths.

(As an aside, it *was* satisfying to see the wizened and scholarly mage assess the situation and then proclaim loudly, "RUN!!!!")

* * *

When watching a 3-hour movie with 217 movie trailers beforehand, it is generally *not* a good idea to get a football helmet-sized caffeinated Cherry Coke, nor is it wise to drink said Cherry Coke before the movie even begins. This is an especially a bad idea in a movie that's part one of a trilogy, where you *know* it's not going to broadcast its ending, nor, really, even have an ending per se.

Er, not that I'm speaking from experience or anything . . .

* * *

Okay; this is my doctoral thesis material right here.

I'd like to point out that, as best I can tell by watching the movie, there are *no* human women in the entire world. I'd also point out that it's humans who generally go bug-nuts over the One True Ring. Hobbits, who seem to have plenty of women in their village, can handle the ring with relative ease. Elves, who again have dating possibilities, seem to do okay with the ring. Humans who are dating elves seem all right being near the ring. But the rest of the men seem to grab for the first yonic symbol they can. And the dwarf -- for whom we also have no evidence of females of the race -- also goes a bit nuts, too . . . albeit manifested in an axe-wielding rage.

In other words, there seems to be a direct relation between interpersonal frustration and the desire to get the ring.

(Now, I have it on good authority that there will, in fact, be a human woman in the second movie. Hopefully I'll get my doctoral degree before then . . .)

* * *

According to my research, all three movies were filmed at the same time for a total cost of \$180 million (which, after the favorable exchange rate in New Zealand is taken into account, was worth approximately \$350 million). Between this movie and *Harry Potter And The Sorcerer's Stone* earlier this year, I've been definitely pleased to see movies for the first time where I thought, "Wow! This is a movie that cost a \$100+ million to make that actually *looks* like it cost \$100+ million to make!" I hope this trend continues.

* * *

And hopefully I'll be better -- and more coherent -- next week.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Book of the Wyrms 2nd Edition**, p. 50.*

(Three stars) "The Viking women of real history played a powerful role in their societies, often dictating the length and nature of the feuds and imposing their considerable strength of will on local politics. However, they egged their men into battle instead of picking up sword and shield themselves."

A Firmament of Rocs

*"All feathered things yet ever knowne to men,
From the huge Rucke, unto the little Wren;
From Forrest, Fields, from Rivers and from Pons,
All that have webs, or cloven-footed ones;
To the Grand Arke, together friendly came,
Whose severall species were too long to name."
-- Michael Drayton, "Noah's Flood" (1630)*

So begins the roc, in this column at least, at the head of the birds and surrounded by water. The roc, in his widening gyre, will return to those positions, and his outstretched pinions will brush many others, even to the ends of the universe. Which, as it turns out, the roc has seen for itself. So look up, into the all-sheltering sky, into the eye of the roc, and listen for the thunder of mighty wings.

*"I saw that the cloud was none other than an enormous bird, of gigantic girth and inordinately wide of wing, which as it flew through the air veiled the sun and hid it from the island. At this sight my wonder redoubled and I remembered a story I had heard aforetime of pilgrims and travelers, how in a certain island dwelleth a huge bird, called the rukh, which feedeth its young on elephants."
-- Richard Burton (trans.), *The Thousand Nights And A Night*, "The Tale of the Second Voyage of Sindbad the Seaman"*

The roc, or rukh, or at least his name, comes to us first in the *Arabian Nights*, which is to say about a thousand years ago give or take a century. (His name comes to us from the Persian *rukḥ*, which oddly enough is also where the [chess](#) "rook" originates, but from there, we hit a blank wall.) In the *Nights*, the roc is an enormous bird who lives on a mysterious island somewhere in the China Seas (which may, or may not, be what we now call the Indian Ocean). The roc eats elephants, and the occasional rhinoceros, pouncing on them as a hawk does a field mouse. Rocs can carry men without even noticing the weight, as one did when Sinbad lashed himself to the roc's claw to escape the island upon which he had been shipwrecked. The roc's egg is so large that, half-buried in the sand, it can be mistaken for an alabaster or ivory domed building. Both Sinbad the Sailor and one Abd-el-Rahman "the Moor" (also, confusingly, nicknamed "the Chinaman") encounter the Island of the Roc; both incur the roc's wrath when their men break into the egg, kill the chick inside and eat its flesh. The parent roc then follows the ship out to sea and drops rocks on it until the ship is sunk, usually leaving only the canonical sole survivor to tell the tale.

*"For persons who had been there and had seen it told Messer Marco Polo that it was for all the world like an eagle, but one indeed of enormous size; so big in fact that its wings covered an extent of 30 paces, and its quills were 12 paces long, and thick in proportion. And it is so strong that it will seize an elephant in its talons and carry it high into the air, and drop him so that he is smashed to pieces . . . The people of those isles [Madeigascar and Zanghibar] call the bird Ruc, and it has no other name. . . . They brought (as I heard) to the Great Khan a feather of the said Ruc, which was stated to measure 90 spans, whilst the quill part was two palms in circumference, a marvellous object!"
-- Marco Polo, *Travels**

Marco Polo unhesitatingly places the roc, or ruc, on [Madagascar](#), where he promptly confuses it with our other aerial enigma, the [griffin](#). Madagascar does possess two of the most likely explanations for the roc; the raphia palm (whose dried fronds do rather resemble enormous feathers) and (or at least it did in Polo's day) the Aepyornis, also evocatively called the "elephant bird," a kind of giant ten-foot ostrich with eggs two feet around. (One can imagine an Arab sailor seeing those "chicks" and wondering how big the parent bird must be.) More tenuously, fossil ceratopsians (whose beaks, hips, and ribs might have seemed like the remains of an enormous bird), an extinct giant vulture of Malta (which sadly would still be unable to lift even the dwarf Maltese elephant), and an amazingly lost condor have all been tagged as the "real" roc.

Another great traveler, Ibn Battuta, saw the Island of the Roc in the Indian Ocean, or rather, he saw a mountain in the middle of the air which the sailors assured him was actually the roc itself. This has spawned a kind of desperate

speculation that the roc originated with the sight of a mirage-mountain at first explained as the roost of the roc and then as the roc itself, a bird as big as a mountain in mid-air. Explaining the roc as a mirage, however, seems even less satisfactory than explaining it as a fossil or an ostrich, or even a fossil ostrich.

*"In Kâf the simorg hath its dwelling-place,
The all-knowing bird of ages, who hath seen
The world with all its children thrice destroyed."*

-- Robert Southey, *Thalaba the Destroyer*, viii:19 (1797)

Evidently the roc's wingspan can't be contained within the boundaries of history, then. It outsizes even one whole mythology; the shadow of the roc falls almost everywhere on Earth. The first line of descent runs from the roc to the legendary Arab anka, which lived for 1700 years before dying (significantly like the phoenix) in flames. Originally the Bird of Perfection, the anka's predations began depopulating whole regions until Allah banished it to an island on the edge of the world. On the other wing, we have the Persian simurgh, or simorg, which was the bird that nested in the original Tree of Knowledge at the center of the world; it lived forever (or for 2000 years) and also ate elephants. The simurgh may have come, like the [manticore](#), out of India, where the enormous Garuda bird appears in the Vedic hymns flying between earth and heaven as the mount of Vishnu. Similar Indian influence might be the source of the roc, especially their shared connection with the Indian Ocean, and with the mountain between earth and heaven (Qaf to the Moslems, Meru to the Indians). Both the Garuda and the roc convey immortality; the Garuda brings it as nectar from the moon, while the sailors who survive eating roc flesh never age. Other giant birds include the thunderbird and piasa of Indian tribes all across the Americas, the norka of Russia, the Turkish kerkes, and the bar yuchre and ziz of Jewish legend; the vision of an enormous bird, blotting out the sun, and carrying men, horses, or elephants off as prey seems universal.

"Moreover, the valley swarmed with snakes and vipers, each big as a palm tree, that would have made but one gulp of an elephant. And they came out by night, hiding during the day lest the rocs and eagles pounce on them and tear them to pieces, as was their wont, why I wot not."

-- Richard Burton (trans.), *The Thousand Nights And A Night*, "The Tale of the Second Voyage of Sindbad the Seaman",

And another odd twist follows the legend more often than not; the roc is the mortal enemy of the serpent. Where he kills the elephant for food, the serpent he kills as his duty. The eagle and snake emblem on the Mexican flag, descended from the vision in Aztec legend that founded Tenochtitlan, eerily parallels the war between the Garuda and the serpentine Naga. If the simurgh nests in the Tree of Knowledge, the dragon at its base might be seen as its reflection, or opposite, and to the extent that Qaf is Eden -- a paradise at the center of the world -- we have another sighting of the serpent Enemy. Perhaps we begin to get a hint of the roc's true mythological purpose here; to watch and war upon the Leviathan, Tiamat, and the other creatures of the deep that roil and lurk just out of sight at the edges of the map.

"And he took me and led me where the sun goes forth . . . and I beheld a bird circling before the sun, about nine cubits away. And I said to the angel, What is this bird? And he said to me, This is the guardian of the earth . . . And the bird expanded his wings, and I saw on his right wing very large letters, as large as the space of a threshing-floor, the size of about four thousand modii; and the letters were of gold. And the angel said to me, Read them. And I read and they ran thus: Neither earth nor heaven bring me forth, but wings of fire bring me forth."

-- 3 Baruch 6:1-9

Thus the roc becomes a guardian of reality, encompassing and observing the world. The roc embodies all four elements: as the king of birds it rules the air, its island in the Ocean or its tree at the source of all rivers rules the water, its egg recapitulates the earth as does its floating mountain, and it rules fire as the sun-bird. The roc in 3 Baruch also dies in the fire, like the phoenix (and sometimes the simurgh and anka). Perhaps the four guardians of the watchtowers at the corners of the world, the Aethyrs or Angels of Dee's Enochian tradition, are actually rocs. The roc is the rook, and the rook is a castle (or watchtower), after all. The rook, interestingly, began as an elephant, much as the eight elephants at the corners of the world also hatched from the egg of the Garuda. Perhaps the roc dines on the very concept of elephants, rather than the physical pachyderm itself, leaving mastodon skeletons scattered across the wilds

of the north. The simurgh has seen and remembered all of history (and an elephant never forgets), witnessing the end of every age before this one. (This, by the way, is why the Queen of Sheba kept one around.) Is the roc, then, the observer who makes sure that when the earth falls, it makes a sound?

The fallen egg of the bar juchne supposedly destroyed sixty villages; if the ziz folds its wings, the unshaded Earth burns to a cinder. Without the roc, does [reality itself quake](#) and tremble? Is that the true meaning of the hail of stones from heaven that follows the death of a roc, fallen fragments of the once-solid past? Did such a death destroy the "egg-born" Lemurians, also sprung from Madagascar, foolishly allied with the "Serpents and Dragons of Light," leaving the griffins as the broken echo of both races? Do the [sphinxes](#), dark shadows of the simurgh, wait on the other side of the [mirror](#) for the next roc to fall and for their hour to come round at last? Keep watching the skies -- if the roc isn't, then someone has to.

Circle Of Fear -- Part II

A GURPS Atomic Horror Adventure

by Stephen Dedman

In [Part I](#) of "Circle of Fear," the PCs investigated a series of UFO sightings, crop circles, and rains of fish and other creatures. If they followed these clues, it should have led to their being abducted by an alien scoutship. Part I ends with the PCs escaping from the saucer into Lake Baikal, Siberia, unaware that they are all little more than an inch tall . . .

Them!

After being jettisoned from the cylinders, the PCs will find themselves in the cold (but not frozen) water of Lake Baikal, surrounded by apparently gigantic fish.

Reaching the surface will require 10 successful rolls on Swimming skill; normal failures will merely cost them fatigue, but a critical failure will mean that they have attracted the attention of a hungry monster -- a pike or sturgeon which looks as large as a whale. If attacked, the PC will either have to make a successful Dodge roll, or an attack doing a minimum of 3 points damage to deter the fish (see "Combat in and under water," p. B91), or be swallowed whole -- though apart from possible after-effects of a failed Fright Check (roll at -4), this is merely a temporary inconvenience (see below).

PCs who aren't swallowed by fish should make it to the surface uninjured, if exhausted; if any are in danger of drowning, bubbles of gas escaping from the sinking ship should boost them to the surface, or female PCs may be rescued by the amphibious Tuskers. There will also be enough unidentifiable pieces of flotsam from the saucer for the PCs to use as life-preservers, rafts, etc. -- though they may still have to defend themselves from "giant" fish or water tigers before reaching the shore.

The Tuskers will part company with the PCs before they reach the shore (though they may re-appear later; see "The Creature Walks Among Us," below), leaving the PCs to try to establish where they are. The muddy soil is littered with long woody stakes, while nearby vast trees, apparently miles high, tower above them like mountains. Above them, they can see a dark sky, with clouds obscuring too many of the stars for them to identify constellations. A roll on Naturalist or Botany will reveal that they are in a normal conifer forest, but shrunk to a very small fraction of their original size. A few seconds later, a loud whining noise (+4 to hearing rolls) will herald the approach of a swarm of "giant" midges. Use the stats for striges (p. B145). 1d+1 midges will attack each PC. If the PCs lack weapons, pine needles may be found that are the right size for crude but adequate batons, clubs, staffs or spears (thr-1 imp., +1 if used 2-handed). If the midges are killed, they will spurt blood and ichor over whoever swats them.

After each PC has killed at least one midge, it will start raining, with drops hitting like water bombs: roll ST or DX (whichever is better), or fall over. The rain will scatter the midges. If the PCs don't start running for cover, the first hail-stone will smash a few hexes away from them, and the next one will be much closer (3d+3 crushing damage if it hits). The nearest shelter is a 40-hex run away, a shallow depression underneath a tree root. Each PC should make a vision roll at -4 to see the spider web spanning the gap. PCs who fail this roll will have to make a DX roll to avoid running into the web; a critical failure on vision means no DX roll. Anyone running into the web will be grappled, suffering an immediate -2 to DX. A contest of ST is needed to break free, and the web has ST of 13. A failed roll results in the victim becoming further entangled, costing 1 point of fatigue. For purposes of cutting, each strand of web has DR 3 and HT 6, and each strand cut reduces the web's ST by 2. The spider will arrive 1d+1 turns after something touches its web; if someone is still entangled when it gets there, it will begin adding one strand every other turn to the web to strengthen it. Unless attacked, it will not bite someone who is not thoroughly entangled (e.g. whose effective ST is at least 6 less than the web's).

Giant Fish

ST 50-70; **DX** 10; **IQ** 2; **HT** 12/50-70.

Move/Dodge 9/7; Size (30-40+); PD/DR 1/1#; Weight (10-20 tons); Damage (swallows whole); Reach C.

Water Tiger (Dragonfly Larva)

ST 12-16; **DX** 16; **IQ** 2; **HT** 10-14.

Move/Dodge 6/8; Size 2; PD/DR 1/2; Weight 60-125 lbs; Damage 1d imp; Reach C, 1.

Giant Spider

ST 20; **DX** 15; **IQ** 2; **HT** 14/20.

Move/Dodge 6/7; Size 4; PD/DR 2/2; Weight 400 lbs; Damage 1d imp*; Reach C.

* Bite injects Type C venom, 1d-1 damage.

If the PCs are underground, under the root, or inside a fish when they return to normal size, they will take 1 point of damage (minor abrasions), and be left looking wet, disheveled, and (particularly if they're trying to wield normal-sized pine needles as weapons) foolish. Any damage inflicted by the bugs will have to heal or be healed normally, but if anyone is suffering the effects of the "giant" spider's venom, their DX will return to normal in 20-HT minutes. The PCs will then have approximately nine hours to perform first aid (if needed), find dry wood and start a fire, and try to get their bearings, before the Russians arrive, a few minutes after sunrise. The air temperature will drop to freezing (20-30 degrees) for 1d+1 hours overnight; see p. B130.

The easiest ways to establish their location are with Naturalist, Botany, or Ecology (-3, in Siberia; -10, on the shores of Lake Baikal). Successful rolls on Astronomy or Navigation will tell them that they're still in the Northern Hemisphere, and (-5 to roll), somewhere between the 50th and 60th Parallels, but nothing more. This becomes academic a few minutes after sunrise when a helicopter, marked with a red star, lands nearby, and four men with Simonov SKS carbines, fur hats and military uniforms come running out.

The four Russian soldiers have been sent to search for the plane which the saucer (inadvertently) brought down; if they see the PCs, they will try to arrest them on the suspicion of being spies or saboteurs, and take them to Dr. Zupanov's research center (see The Brain that Would Not Die, below). The PCs may attempt to:

- **Hide.** Contest of Stealth or Camouflage against IQ -- with a +5 modifier for the soldiers if the PCs have lit a fire or left other obvious clues to their presence. If they evade the soldiers (and the soldiers will return the next day and every 1d days after that, searching for any debris from the saucer), they will have to survive the oncoming winter (and possibly encounters with local animals, including brown bears and the world's largest tigers) until they can get to friendly or neutral territory by other means. This will be extremely difficult, especially if they don't speak Russian or have any appropriate Area Knowledge, Savoir-Faire, or Streetwise skills. They will be in constant danger of being reported to the authorities and taken to the Research Center for interrogation . . . but they shouldn't be prohibited from trying to (for example) hike to the nearest town (Nizhneangarsk, population 10,000, with a railway station, airstrip, and fish processing plant), catch the Trans-Siberian railway to Moscow, and try to convince the staff at the US Embassy that they're not spies, haven't been brainwashed, etc., and should be permitted to return home.
- **Fight.** The Russian soldiers are almost certainly better armed than the PCs, and probably in better condition, but they may still be outnumbered and outmaneuvered, and they will try to bring as many witnesses as possible back to Dr. Zupanov alive, while the PCs might not be so delicate. Like hiding, attacking the soldiers will accomplish little unless the PCs also manage to steal or hijack the helicopter and fly it out of Russia, or use the stolen weapons and uniforms to try to bluff their way to some other form of transportation. If the soldiers do not return, another party (or two) will be sent out in 1d+1 hours.
- **Hijack the helicopter.** Stealthy PCs may be able to evade the Russian soldiers and sneak into the helicopter and

either overpower or intimidate the pilot. The soldiers will come running if they hear any shots or shouting. If the pilot is unwilling or rendered unable to fly the helicopter, the PCs may have to fly it themselves (-2 for unfamiliar model, and defaults to IQ at -9, not -5, unless the PC can also read Russian). If they succeed at flying back to friendly or neutral territory (the helicopter has a range of 405 miles -- enough to take them to Ulan Bator -- and top speed of 135 mph), the adventure is over; go to "The Creature Walks Among Us."

- **Surrender.** The soldiers will then take them directly to the Research Center.

The Brain That Would Not Die

The soldiers who take the PCs to the Research Center will report immediately to Natalya, who will perform a medical examination, do her best to heal any wounds the PCs may be suffering, and then order Ivan and the soldiers to strip the PCs of all clothing but their underwear (-5 to Holdout and Arctic Survival) and then confine them to the cell beneath the lab. When this is done, the soldiers will then retire to their barracks.

The lab is cluttered with scientific equipment and textbooks, half-finished experiments and disemboweled gadgets, rats in cages, and biological specimens in jars. Amid this mess, the PCs will need to make vision or Science! rolls at -10 to notice that one of the brains in jars is connected by tubes and wires to a number of tanks and instrument panels, or that the faintly glowing camera eyes of the clumsy-looking robot standing near this brain move slightly to keep Natalya in view. The robot will only move if the PCs attempt any sort of attack or resistance, and then it will fight to defend Natalya and the brain.

If the PCs do not resist, they will be kept in the cell for 24 hours while Zupanov readies his mind probe. The cell floor and ceiling are of 6'-thick concrete (DR 4; see p. B125), and the walls of 3" brick (DR 3), set in frozen soil (DR 2). The door is of 1" iron bars (DR 3), which also cover the small window (6" by 1' -- large enough to let in cold air and rain, but too small for even a skinny character to squeeze through). The lock on the door is -2 to Lockpicking attempts. The cell is lit by a single low-watt bulb. The air temperature will drop to freezing (20-30 degrees) for 1d+1 hours each night. Any PC who gets a Good or Better reaction from Natalya or Ivan will be given a rough blanket (treat as normal winter clothing) to protect them from the cold.

The PCs' weapons, clothes and gear should be divided more-or-less evenly among Natalya, Ivan and the soldiers, with Natalya getting first pick. Ivan will take a pair of boots or shoes, while the soldiers will be more interested in weapons and American clothes. If/when the PCs seek to recover these items, they will be found on the NPC who took them, or in their quarters.

While in the cell, the PCs will have two meals delivered -- one by Natalya (who will also check up on anyone injured; treat as Physician's care, at -2 for unhealthy surroundings), and one by Ivan. While the food (kasha, buckwheat porridge) is awful, this visit will give the PCs a chance to try to use Fast-Talk, Sex-Appeal, or similar tactics to persuade either Natalya or Ivan to help them escape. Neither will open the cell door unless tricked into doing so (sliding the bowls through a gap between two bars instead), but will come within 1 hex of the bars. If either Natalya or Ivan assist the PCs in escaping, they should be able to reach the hangar without difficulty, and may even have some of their gear returned.

If the PCs have not escaped by the time the 24 hours are over, Ivan and one of the soldiers will return to the cell and escort one PC (Dr. Zupanov will have chosen the apparent leader or most intelligent of the party) upstairs to the lab. The PC will be ordered to sit in a chair (bolted to the floor near a work bench) and manacles and leg-irons will snap shut around his wrists and feet (-5 to Escape rolls); if he resists, the robot and Ivan will force him into the chair (contest of ST). Natalya will then fit the mind probe to his head, and Dr. Zupanov will activate it and run it for 90 minutes, or until he gets a "Scan Ends" result. Go to "The Tingler."

Research center

- **Lab.** Use the "indoor" side of the map from the Basic set for the lab interior (see p.B226). Exterior walls are 6" stone (DR 6), interior walls 3" brick (DR 6), doors and window shutters are 1" wooden slab (DR 2), floor and

ceiling are 6" concrete (DR 4).

- **Stairs.** Leads down to cell.
- **Natalya's bedroom (Kitchen).** Contains small bed, a trunk of clothes (including a radiation suit, spare lab coats, the rest of the PCs' clothes and gear, and 25 Tokarev rounds), and a bookshelf (medical texts and scientific journals in Russian, US movie and fashion magazines in English, novels in both languages). Loaded Tokarev under bed.
- **Kitchen (Pantry).** Contains basic pre-WWII kitchen appliances, a wood stove, a more modern refrigerator and freezer, a samovar of tea, 20 lbs of food (36 man-days), Ivan's bed (near stove), and a stack of firewood. When not on Ivan's belt, a ring of keys (including a key for the cell door) hangs near the door to the stairway.
- **Laboratory (Great Hall).** Contains Dr. Zupanov, Robot, Mind Probe chair and hardware, Biology and Chemistry labs, surgical equipment (treat as a Doctor's black bag), library (all in Russian; +1 for research into Electronics (Computers), Engineering (Robot), Physiology (Brain), and Surgery (Brain)).
- **Bathroom/Storeroom (Max's Bedroom).** Contains bathtub, washing machine, stove, sink, toilet, parts of prototypes of the Tingler and Robot (which a Quick Gadgeteer can use as components), and assorted tools.

Immediately across from the Lab's door to the outside is the Barracks, a simple square building contains 6 bunks, 1 small bathroom, 1 stove, 2 pints of vodka, 5 footlockers, and (usually) the 4 soldiers, the pilot, their weapons, and 400 rounds extra ammunition. Most of the PCs clothes, gear and weapons will also be in here. Walls, doors, and window shutters are 1/2" plywood (DR 3); roof is 1/8" steel (DR 4); floor is 6" concrete (DR 4).

50 yards west of these buildings is a hangar, which contains the helicopter, jeep, generator, 6 5-gallon jerry-cans of petrol, 6 empty jerry-cans, a 400-gallon tank of avgas, and a tool kit. Walls, roof and doors are 1/8" steel (DR 4); floor is 6" concrete (DR 4).

The Tingler

Dr. Zupanov's Mind Probe maps the brain by stimulating different areas -- pleasure, pain, fear, memory, vision, etc. Every 10 minutes that the subject spends being probed, roll 2d and consult the table below.

2 Memory center affected. Subject develops total amnesia for 20-IQ hours. Scan ends.

3 Vision center affected. Subject becomes blind for 20-HT hours.

4 Subject becomes Lecherous for 1d+1 hours.

5 Fear centre stimulated. Make a Fright Check at -4.

6-7 Scan succeeds, giving Zupanov enough data to study for 1 day. Scan ends.

8 Pleasure centre stimulated.

9 Pain centre stimulated: subject suffers Migraine for 1d+1 hours.

10 Random memory retrieved: subject suffers Flashbacks for 1d+1 hours.

11 Random memory retrieved: subject gains 1/2 point in a not-very-useful Mental skill he'd forgotten learning (possibilities include Language or Scientific skills studied in college, Area Knowledge from somewhere he lived many years ago, etc.)

12 Psionic center stimulated. Roll on table below.

1 Subject autoteleports, appearing (still in underwear) in Hangar. Scan ends.

- 2- Subject develops Pyrokinesis (10), inadvertently setting fire to
- 4 Natalya's lab coat. Further attacks made at IQ -3. Power lasts for (IQ +/- Strong/Weak will) minutes.

Subject temporarily "mindswapped" with someone else in lab:

- 5- Zupanov (controls Robot), Natalya, or Ivan, leaving their mind
- 6 imprisoned in his body. Mindswap lasts for (IQ +/- Strong/Weak will) minutes.

If the first probe ends without the subject escaping, Ivan will carry him back to the cell to recover, then tell the PCs that Zupanov and Natalya plan to transplant his (Ivan's) brain into one of their bodies and, if this is successful, to transplant Zupanov's brain into another. 24 hours later, Ivan and two of the soldiers will return to take another subject upstairs for a mind probe. Repeat the procedure.

24 hours after the second probe, if the PCs still haven't found a way to escape, go to Deus Ex Machina.

Deus Ex Machina

Shortly before a third PC (one with good stealth or combat skills) is taken upstairs for interrogation, a team of Russian investigators who have discovered the sunken saucer will try cutting through the hull. In doing so, they will cause the anti-matter power plant in the saucer to explode.

Just as the PC is ordered (or forced) to sit, the explosion will cause a massive electro-magnetic pulse. All the lights in the lab will go out (-8 to Vision for anyone without Night Vision), the Robot will be paralyzed, and Zupanov will be plunged into sensory deprivation. Natalya will realize that her father's life support system has also stopped, and assume that something has gone wrong with the generator. She will send Ilya out to tend the generator, order Ivan to hand-crank the emergency pumps for Zupanov's life support, and order the Robot to prevent the prisoner escaping. If the PC makes a Vision roll, he will notice that the Robot has stopped moving and its eyes are dark and do not track. The PC is not cuffed to the chair, and can leave any time.

The sound of the blast, and the shock wave, will hit 95 seconds after the electro-magnetic pulse. Anyone in the Research Center will have to make a roll vs HT or be deafened (treat as a crippling injury) by the blast -- at +3 for anyone in the cell, at +1 for anyone inside a building at ground level, and at -1 for anyone outside. The main building and the hangar are solid enough to withstand the blast, but the flimsily constructed barracks will collapse, doing 4d crushing damage to everyone inside and pinning them under 2dx10 lbs of debris, and many objects will fall from the shelves in the lab, doing 1d-2 to Natalya and Ivan. Everyone in the research center, including the PCs, will also be exposed to 100 rads from the blast, and a further 2 rads/hour for every hour they spend in the area. Multiply this x4 for anyone not protected by stone or metal walls.

If the PC tries to sneak out, Natalya is at -10 in her contest of IQ vs Stealth, Ivan at -5, and Ilya will not be returning any time soon. The PC can try sneaking outside, or downstairs to try to free his friends. The keys hang from Ivan's belt; use Pickpocket skill to get them without him noticing, or Stealth and a DX roll to grab them and run, or combat.

If the PC decides to attack while he has the advantage of surprise, there are several objects in the room that make good improvised weapons. These include: a tray of surgical implements (treat as 1d+1 small knives), two hexes from the chair; bottles of acid (do damage; roll on Russian language skill to read labels) on the shelves; electric flexes that can be used as garrottes; various instruments and containers that can serve as saps, batons or small maces (pestle, slide rule, heavy bottle, etc.); and the Robot (precariously balanced; roll vs ST to push it over, doing crushing damage to anybody standing behind it).

If the PC is able to threaten Zupanov convincingly, Natalya will order Ivan to hand over his keys and weapons -- and will then try to trap the PCs under the house by bolting the door at the top of the stairs, blocking it with the refrigerator, etc.

When the PCs get outside, they will find Ilya standing in the space between the lab and the hangar -- dazed, dazzled by the fireball, and (if the shock wave has hit) temporarily deafened. His carbine is slung over his shoulder; he will fight to retain it, but at -10 to all DX-based skills. The other soldiers and the pilot are trapped in the ruins of the barracks. If the PCs rescue them, they will react to them at +4 for at least 24 hours after that, and maybe even help them to escape.

The helicopter and jeep have not been damaged by the blast. The PCs can take whichever they are best able to use: the jeep is slower, has a shorter range, and can be stopped more easily, but it's also easier to re-fuel; the helicopter can make it to Ulan Bator, in Mongolia without refueling, but only if the PCs can pilot it and navigate (Navigation -3). The helicopter has a radio that can be used to contact US forces in Korea and Japan; the jeep doesn't.

The Creature Walks Among Us

Once the PCs have escaped from Russia, the adventure is over -- but there are plenty of chances for a sequel. The Tuskers might not only survive, but breed. While they may remain in Siberia during the winter, they will find it unpleasantly warm and humid come summer and migrate south to the Himalayas, possibly inspiring a rash of Yeti sightings. Alternatively, Russian scientists may decide that the Tuskers might make good amphibious troops, and start trying to breed and train them.

While most of the scoutship was vaporized when the power plant exploded, a few fragments may have survived, and the TSF or the Pentagon could decide that these have to be recovered. The mothership may remain in a geostationary orbit above the south pole for years: as it is packed with creatures from dozens of planets (some of them intelligent), as well as advanced alien technology, and much closer even than the moon, it would be an excellent setting for an early TL7 Space adventure. Of course, even if the TSF or another patron can build a rocket that will take the PCs there, they will have to find a way inside, and the saucer will certainly be able to defend itself. Alternatively, once the PCs are inside, the saucer may continue on its course across the galaxy in search of its creators . . .

The Cast

Ivan Igorievich Frykowski

Early 30s; lopsided features, leathery complexion, shaggy dark hair, dark brown eyes; 5'7", 170 lbs.

ST 15; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 14. Move 6

Advantages: Double-jointed; High Pain Threshold.

Disadvantages: Berserk; Duty (to USSR, all the time); Hideous; Hunchback; Jealousy; Poverty (Poor).

Skills: Area Knowledge (USSR)-10; Axe/Mace-12; Brawling-12; Cooking-11; Driving (Truck)-11; Electronics Operation/TL7 (Radio)-11; Engineer/TL7 (Combat Engineering)-10; First Aid/TL7-9; Guns/TL7 (Rifle)-13, (Pistol)-12, (Shotgun)-11; Knife-12; Mechanic/TL7 (Car, Helicopter, Robot)-11; Savoir-Faire (Military)-9; Stealth-9; Thrown Weapon (Axe)-11.

Maneuvers: Neck Snap-13.

Gear: Tokarev; Hatchet; Large Knife; Heavy clothing (sheepskin, leather, and heavy canvas; PD 1, DR 2, +5 to Arctic Survival); gloves; boots; fur cap.

Born in Stalingrad, Ivan Igorievich Frykowski was rejected by the Red Army and was working as a gravedigger when the Nazis invaded the USSR. His professional services were soon greatly in demand, and soon he was working for army engineers. When the war ended, a Kremlin bureaucrat with a quirky sense of humor assigned him to Dr. Zupanov, one of the USSR's more innovative weapons designers, as an assistant.

Robot

Neckless metal cylinder with arms, legs, and dimly glowing red eyes; 7'6"; 360 lbs.

ST 30; DX 8; IQ (4); HT 12/20. Move 6

Advantages: Metal armor, sealed (DR 8, PD 1); Peripheral Vision.

Disadvantages: Bad Grip; Color Blindness; Disturbing Voice; No Sense of Smell/Taste.

Skills: Brawling-8; Guns/TL7 (Machine pistol)-11; Intimidation-15; Shortsword-8.

Zupanov's homemade robot is usually remotely controlled by Zupanov, when it has an effective IQ of 16; when contact is lost with Zupanov, its IQ drops to 4, and it continues to obey the last order it received. It is designed to be the disembodied Zupanov's eyes, hands, and sometimes voice, but doesn't do any of these jobs particularly well, and Zupanov spends much of his time trying to design something more sophisticated to transfer his brain into.

The robot's right arm includes a Tokarev modified for a 71-round drum and autofire (RoF 16*), and can punch for 3d cr.; the left includes a flashlight, cutting torch, and retractable machete blade (6d-1 cut). The head has full rotation and two cameras that give peripheral vision. The body features a short-wave radio and bullhorn, as well as the brain, battery, and gas tank for the torch.

Russian Pilot (Yuri)

ST 10; DX 12; IQ 11; HT 10. Move 5

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; High Pain Threshold.

Disadvantages: Duty (all the time); Lecherousness; Overconfidence; Poverty (Struggling).

Skills: Administration-10; Area Knowledge (Siberia)-9; Brawling-12; Climbing-10; Detect Lies-10; Driving (Car)-12; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-12; First Aid/TL7-11; Guns (Pistol)-14, (Light Automatic)-13; Knife-12; Language (Russian)-11, (English)-9; Mechanic/TL7 (Car, Helicopter)-11; Pilot (Large Helicopter)-14; Running-10; Scrounging-11; Spear-10; Stealth-10; Streetwise-10; Survival (Arctic)-11.

Gear: Tokarev; Small knife; Leather jacket, coveralls, leather helmet, boots.

Russian Soldiers

ST 11; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 11. Move 5

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; High Pain Threshold.

Disadvantages: Duty (all the time); Poverty (Struggling).

Skills: Administration-10; Area Knowledge (Siberia)-9; Brawling-12; Climbing-10; Detect Lies-10; Driving (Car)-11; First Aid/TL7-10; Gambling-10; Guns (Light Automatic, Rifle)-14; Knife-12; Language (Russian)-10; Mechanic/TL7 (Car)-10; Running-10; Scrounging-11; Spear-10; Stealth-10; Streetwise-10; Survival (Arctic)-11.

Gear: Simonov SKS; Large knife; Overcoat, coveralls, fur hat, boots, gloves.

The pilot and soldiers assigned to guard Zupanov's research center were given a job as punishment for minor infractions, but they're generally competent (if unenthusiastic) henchmen who would rather be there than prisoners in a gulag. Each has a weakness and they're open to bribes, but they're not cheap, stupid, or suicidal.

Dmitri has the Military Rank/1 (Sergeant) advantage, and the Bully disadvantage. Pyotr has the Greed disadvantage and Pickpocket-9. Sergei has the Alcoholism disadvantage; Ilya has Unluckiness.

Tusker

See [Part I](#) for the Tuskers' stats.

Natalya Zupanov

Mid 20s; pale complexion, black hair, green eyes; 5'9", 130 lbs.

ST 11; DX 11; IQ 14; HT 13. Move 6

Advantages: Beautiful; Fashion Sense; Voice.

Disadvantages: Curiosity (-5); Dependent (Father, all the time); Self-Centred.

Quirks: Secretly likes American music and clothes; Attracted to intelligent men (+1 to IQ 14, +2 to IQ 15+); Wants to become a doctor.

Skills: Area Knowledge (USSR)-10; Brawling-11; Cooking-10; Driving (Truck)-10; Electronics/TL7 (Computers)-13; Guns/TL7 (Pistol, Rifle)-12; Judo-10; Languages (Russian)-14, (English, French, Mandarin)-12; Mechanic/TL7 (Car, Helicopter, Robot)-10; Physician/TL7-12; Psychology/TL7-13; Research-13; Science!-12; Sex-Appeal-15; Stealth-10; Surgery/TL7-14.

Maneuvers: Knee Strike-13.

Gear: usually wears white lab coat over heavy coverall (PD 0, DR 1, and slightly too tight), boots, and fur cap. Rarely armed.

Natalya is the beautiful (and usually dutiful) daughter of Dr. Vladimir Ilyich Zupanov, but is beginning to become discontented with a life where she is little more than his nurse and his hands. Though it may be possible to win her over with an offer of a more comfortable life, she won't co-operate with her father's killer(s). Natalya has little loyalty to the USSR or to communism; if taken to the USA, she is likely to become a double agent, selling secrets to the highest bidder.

Dr. Vladimir Zupanov

Brain in bulletproof glass case, with assorted gadgets attached. 2000 lbs.

ST -; DX 11; IQ 16; HT 10/6.

Advantages: Gadgeteer, Realistic; Mathematical Ability; Versatile.

Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Callous; Disturbing Voice; No Physical Body; Obsession (acquire or create new body); Stubbornness.

Skills: Area Knowledge (USSR)-15; Armoury/TL7 (Body Armor)-14; Astronomy/TL7-15; Computer Programming/TL7-14; Computer Operation/TL7-16; Detect Lies-14; Electronics/TL7 (Computers)-17; Engineer/TL7 (Robotics)-17; Interrogation-14; Intimidation-15; Languages (Russian)-16, (English)-14, (Latin)-14; Mathematics/TL7-14; Physician/TL7-16; Physics/TL7-16; Psychology/TL7-13; Research-16; Science!-14; Strategy (Land)-13.

Dr. Vladimir Ilyich Zupanov was one of the Soviet Union's most brilliant robotic engineers. He spent the Great Patriotic War working on guidance systems for missiles while dreaming of more ambitious projects -- including better prosthetic arms and legs for maimed soldiers, mine-clearing robots, and space probes. After the war, he was put in charge of a project to develop a robot tank, but the tank's brain malfunctioned and it went on a rampage, nearly killing Zupanov as it went. When the robotank was finally destroyed, Stalin banished most of the scientists and engineers to Siberia, and had Zupanov's brain kept alive to work off his debt to the USSR.

Zupanov is still laboring to build himself a body that will enable him to escape from Siberia and endear himself to the Kruschev administration, but his personality becomes less human and more machinelike every year his brain spends in a glass case.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



The Lost Tribe of the Library

by **Loki Carbis**

Somewhere, way back among the dim and dusty shelves of the library, there exists a restless tribe of comprised of the misfits, the outcasts and the merely lost. This motley assemblage is the fabled Lost Tribe. Living deep in the shadows, surviving on a diet of old paper and rat meat, the Lost Tribe is a rumour to the other patrons. Still, someone must be drawing those weird cabinet paintings -- or is it just student hi-jinks?

Unknown to almost all, deep in the bookshelves of the night, the Lost Tribe is real. Overwhelmingly male and poorly washed, mostly composed of nerds and geeks, and, as a group, prone to Absent-Mindedness. Deep in the stacks, they have constructed a primitive but (mostly) functional society, away from prying eyes. More gatherer than hunter, but not afraid to play up to the role, the Lost Tribe may not be very advanced -- but they are very deadly.

The weaponry of the Lost Tribe ranges from TL0 to TL3, although usually lacking in bows or catapults (and never featuring any other sort of siege weapon), due to the rarity of the necessary fibres to string such weapons. However, rather than stone, it is usually constructed of wood or metal (taken from shelves or other fittings) or glass (scavenged from bins and unattended tables). Their other technology can be anywhere from TL0 up to the base level of the campaign (assumed to be TL7 in this article). It will mostly consist of stolen or improvised equipment, and some things we take for granted will be very rare. Ropes, for example, are not often found in libraries, and so must be made from woven together threads scavenged from clothes and carpets -- a time-consuming process and one that leads to very oddly coloured ropes.

The social organisation of the Lost Tribe is similar to that described for bands in *GURPS Low-Tech*, although what "families" exist are purely invented, since only second or later generation members of the tribe are actually related to each other. Food is gathered mostly by trapping rats and stealing it from unwary library patrons. Depending upon the actual library, the range of food may vary somewhat: a library with a conspicuous rat problem may have cats as well, which will also be preyed upon by the Tribe. (Less fastidious Tribe members might also steal the food and milk left for these cats.) In the basement levels of a library, weird farms of fungi and lichen may grow, but overall, the diet of the Lost Tribe will be lacking in fruits and vegetables -- which doesn't lead to a very healthy diet for the Tribe. (Mental or Physical Disadvantages based on missing dietary requirements are certainly appropriate to more realistic versions of the Tribe.)

The Illuminated Tribe

Depending on how exactly your game world works, the Lost Tribe could change its nature profoundly. This is how the Lost Tribe might appear through each of the four "lenses" from *GURPS Warehouse 23*.

The Mundane

The Lost Tribe, if it isn't just an urban myth of some sort, is probably very small indeed -- maybe only one person, most likely an eccentric researcher, and probably a reclusive nut rather than actually lost. Alternately, maybe it's just a student prank designed to freak out the freshmen -- it certainly makes a great excuse for a party.

The Occult

The Lost Tribe has discovered forgotten magicks unknown to most of humanity -- either through finding them in the books of the library, or through achieving a better understanding of reality in returning to primitivism. In this case, their magic is likely to be either improvised (see *GURPS Magic*) or shamanic (as in *GURPS Spirits*).

The Fortean

Pretty much anything goes -- maybe the reason the Lost Tribe never emerges is that they're too weird and mutated for the world to cope with them anymore (or vice versa). Or maybe they've mastered the mysteries of L-Space and have other fish to fry.

The Illuminated

The Lost Tribe is a warning. Every last member of the Tribe is there because the Conspiracy has messed with their heads, and they can no longer find the way out of the Library. But the Conspiracy never wastes anything potentially useful -- killing them outright would be a much less effective warning, and run the unnecessary risk of creating martyrs. And some Tribe members may well have knowledge that the Conspiracy still wants (a la GURPS *The Prisoner*).

Campaign Role

The Lost Tribe can be a small piece of minor weirdness, or a major antagonist, or pretty much anything in between. Probably the best use for them is as guardians of whatever is hidden. Their location in the library means that they may well have in their position nearly any book (or disc, or magazine, or whatever) that the characters may need for any purpose. Whether to protect the book or to protect others from it -- or to use it themselves -- is entirely dependent on their role in the game.

The question of how big a secret the Lost Tribe is must also be answered. Maybe all the library staff and patrons know about them and think nothing of it, or maybe they're just a legend. The most practical way to keep the secret is to use some variation of the Mundanity advantage (*GURPS IOU*, p. 19) or some similar workaround.

The Lost Tribe could easily be the rescuers of the characters if for some reason they're attacked in the library -- and they may not feel inclined to let the characters return to the outer world and tell others of their existence. This is even more likely if some members of the Lost Tribe are people who believed to have disappeared -- but have in fact joined the Lost Tribe -- some of them may well be believed dead by the mundane world.

If the theories of L-Space (See the sidebar on page 115 of GURPS *Discworld*) are correct, then the Lost Tribe may well be able to travel from library to library at will -- although they may not actually be aware that they can do this.

Other Tribes

As written, the Lost Tribe could be dropped into either *GURPS IOU* or *GURPS Discworld* without any changes needed. And it would only take a small amount of re-writing to fit them into a *GURPS Warehouse 23* game. Likewise, the libraries, archives or warehouses of various umbral realms in either *GURPS Werewolf: The Apocalypse* or *GURPS Mage: The Ascension* could easily be homes to Lost Tribes of their own.

Liberating the idea of the Lost Tribe from the library setting, there could be such a tribe just about anywhere. In *GURPS Vampire: The Masquerade* and *GURPS Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, the Nosferatu clan and Bone Gnawer tribe both fall into this sort of category, dwelling in the sewers beneath the city. Another logical place for Lost Tribes is in a modern shopping mall -- obviously, the larger the better. (Combining this article with "Space-Time for the Advanced Mallwalker" could make the Lost Tribe stranger still. The Lost Tribe would be a fourth faction in that setting, not allied with the Locksmiths or the Couriers, although they may have some sort of understanding or alliance with the Mall hivemind.) Further out, how about a Lost Tribe deep in the forgotten underburrows of a *GURPS Bunnies and Burrows* game? A Lost Tribe of disembodied cyberpunks lost somewhere in the un-used portions of the Net? Or a Lost Tribe composed of escaped prisoners of an underground labyrinth? (This idea could easily be adapted to *GURPS Greece*, *GURPS Special Ops*, or *GURPS Swashbucklers*.)

Adventure Seeds:

Secret? What Secret?

The library is invaded by an event that brings a lot of media attention. Maybe a crime is committed in the building, or maybe someone famous is dedicating the new wing in a ceremony this Friday. However it comes to pass, the Lost Tribe finds its foraging area greatly cut down and its privacy rapidly evaporating. Will they be forced out into the open? Will they kill to protect their secret? Or can the characters find a third way?

. . . So Goes My Nation

When it's decided that the library has to move to a new location, there's one small hitch: the Lost Tribe don't want to go. And they know things about guerilla warfare that make the North Vietnamese Army look like beginners. The characters might be a team of enforcers hired to "clear" the premises -- or they might be ordinary library patrons caught in the middle. (The latter could make an unusual starting point for a conspiracy or weirdness based campaign.)

One Of Us, One Of Us

The Lost Tribe, for reasons unclear, has decided to recruit one or more members of the character party into its ranks. As a result, each time the characters return to the library, they find themselves subject to an escalating series of trials, tests and ordeals -- all part of the Tribe's initiation ritual.

The World in a Bottle

by David Morgan-Mar

Herge, the author of the *Adventures of Tintin* comic books, once had a plan to set the entire plot of a book within an airport departure lounge. He said that an airport contains "the whole world on a reduced scale . . . tragedies, jokes, exoticism, and adventure." These four elements are also basic ingredients for interesting and exciting roleplaying adventures. So let's examine what such a restricted microcosm as a setting can offer.

The basic concept we are exploring is the idea of setting an adventure in a single, physically small location. The meaning of "small" may vary by circumstance, as we shall see. The player characters will be restricted from leaving this small location, either by physical isolation, regulations, happenstance, or even simply because there is no need for them to leave.

Total Isolation

In the simplest case -- physical isolation -- NPCs will also probably be prevented from leaving, or arriving at, the adventure location. An example would be on board a ship at sea. The valiant heroes are stuck on the ship, just as is every member of the crew and any passengers. A small underground settlement on a new colony world with a hostile atmosphere and no supply ship expected for another week provides a more literally claustrophobic setting.

This sort of set-up provides a very controlled environment in which the GM can structure the adventure. The number of NPCs is fixed and, if there are not too many, they can all be enumerated and described to whatever level of detail is required. This eliminates the possibility that the adventurers will travel to an unexpected location and encounter people for whom no background or statistics can have been prepared.

Of course, many GMs are comfortable with running partially improvised adventures, rattling off a convincing string of personal details for every shop assistant in any department store the heroes may decide to enter on a whim, but not all of us are so blessed. Restricting the environment and the number of possible encounters means the GM can maintain a greater level of pre-prepared detail. This is especially important in genres which benefit from atmosphere and easy suspension of disbelief, such as horror or anything which deeply explores character motivations and emotions.

Isolated Adventure Themes

There are several adventure themes which are particularly suited to the isolated location setting. Murder mysteries are a classic example. Suspense is easily built when a group of people are trapped in close proximity with no escape and the murder victims start piling up. The old country mansion cut off from civilization by a raging storm comes to mind, as does the Orient Express.

Avoiding a disaster is another suitable theme. The disaster can either be caused by chance, such as a fire or an attack by wildlife, or by a human agency, such as a terrorist bomb which needs to be found and neutralized. The villains hijacking the vehicle in which the heroes are travelling is probably the most familiar example of this theme, with the vehicle itself serving as the restricted location. This is a high action theme, especially compared to the more cerebral murder mystery.

Escaping from the location provides a third possible theme. In this case the location is either a prison of some sort or a place which is about to become dangerous in some way. The prison need not be literal -- a group of shipwreck survivors on a deserted island naturally wish to escape from their isolation. Escaping can overlap with avoiding disaster: Perhaps a way to overcome the hijackers is to land the plane and get off -- though this will certainly be a task requiring skill and daring.

A theme less often explored by roleplayers, but which is useful for the restricted location, is romance. Romance worthy of a roleplaying adventure often instigates strong personal conflicts, and such conflicts are naturally magnified when they occur in the pressure-cooker environment of enforced proximity. Imagine *Romeo and Juliet* playing out in a tiny mountain village, or a snowbound apartment building, rather than the vastness of Verona. The film *Titanic*, although perhaps not to everyone's cinematic tastes, is a powerful example of how romance and interpersonal conflicts provide drama in an isolated setting. (It also segues neatly into avoiding disaster and escaping the doomed location.)

Isolated on a Vehicle

As can be seen from the sample themes, a common isolated location is the confines of a vehicle. Commercial passenger vehicles are ideal, since they provide a number of NPCs to use as allies and enemies, including some measure of "law" (the vehicle crew) which may either be subverted, eliminated, or appealed to for help. If the characters own a vehicle of their own, it can be used for disaster plots with mechanical malfunctions, stowaways, or environmental damage.

Airplanes and passenger ships come to mind immediately as vehicles in which adventures can take place. Science fiction adds spaceships. The film **Alien** is an archetypal example of how a fairly simple plot is made to feel intensely claustrophobic and suspenseful by the isolation of the characters and their restricted mobility.

More exotic vehicles present interesting adventuring environments by virtue of being unfamiliar to most people. Airships are popular, but also consider vessels not usually associated with carrying passengers, such as merchant ships (low-tech or modern), cargo planes, or hot air balloons. Military vessels provide another source of ready-made adventure locations, particularly if the heroes aren't supposed to be on board. Submarines are especially useful.

Isolation by Circumstance

A different way to constrain characters is to place them in a situation in which only they cannot move freely. NPCs may be able to come and go at will, but something inhibits this same freedom for the heroes. Sometimes this doesn't make much difference to them, but often the fact that they are restricted while other folks are not is a source of frustration. Overcoming this frustration can be a motivation which drives the adventure naturally.

Isolated by Regulations

The law can be a bummer for anyone who manages to get entangled in it, even on the right side. The cops might not be able to chase the crooks over state or national borders. The sheriff might order the group of wandering gunslingers not to leave town while he tries to sort out whatever shooting mess has occurred.

If the characters might be able to deliver a greater justice by breaking some regulations, should they do it? This is one of the classic sources of conflict in fiction, both internal and external. The moral dilemmas are often obvious, but the solutions far from it, and whatever course of action the heroes take they may get chewed out by their boss, fired, arrested, killed, or destroyed along with the rest of the world.

Not all regulations are imposed by law. In many games characters get hurt. Yet not many GMs use the opportunity to advance the plot by playing out time spent in hospital. Our hero is sleeping off a dose of morphine when he wakes to see the evil Dr Claw standing in the room. "That was just a warning. Nobody crosses Dr Claw!" Claw exits calmly, leaving the hero struggling to his feet and trying to convince the nurse in the corridor he's not hysterical and to block all hospital exits and no, he doesn't want to go back to his bed, damnit!

The other great source of regulations is parents, but games in which the players take the roles of minors are rare. Besides, these are the sort of regulations which are bound to be broken anyway -- would you rather play Ferris Bueller or Richie Cunningham? Creative GMs may however find some use for parental restrictions, probably in humorous games. One possibility is a *Toon* game using the Toony Tyke Adventures setting from the *Tooniversal Tour Guide*.

Academic institutions also have regulations. University students are viable characters in games ranging from *GURPS IOU* to *Call of Cthulhu*. The *Harry Potter* novels by J. K. Rowling provide plenty of inspiration for a fantasy campaign based on boarding school students, who must continually battle against school rules in order to go where they shouldn't and solve mysteries under the noses of the adults.

Isolated by Chance

This is really a catch-all category covering any other method of keeping characters in one location. The airport lounge mentioned in the opening sentence of this article is an example. The heroes could leave the airport if they really wanted to, but they need to catch their flight so can't go far without things becoming inconvenient. With an adventure in an airport, say a terrorist attack or runway hostage drama, there probably isn't much reason to leave anyway (assuming they want to do something about it and not just go home where it's nice and safe, like normal people).

Sometimes characters just get unlucky. (Okay, all the time . . .) Their car breaks down in the storm and they seek shelter at the creepy looking house on the hill. Night falls before they make it out of the Daunting Forest. The elevators stop working and someone accidentally dumped a load of concrete behind the fire door. These are really methods of creating an isolated situation. Once the situation is established it becomes like any other, except the adventurers can shake their heads and say, "If only such and such had never happened . . ."

A chance isolation can be a good way to increase tension suddenly in a game. Things were going well for Chekov, draining gamma rays from the nuclear power plant on a US aircraft carrier in *Star Trek IV*, until Scotty's transporter failed. Mechanical failures and vehicle crashes are typical methods of unexpectedly isolating characters. Low tech traps work just as well: The heavy portcullis blocking the only known dungeon exit dramatically heightens the need to explore.

Using Isolated Locations

The isolated adventure location can serve in several capacities, from an entire campaign setting, to a short scene within a longer adventure. The general rule is: The more plot time expected, the larger the location needs to be.

The Isolated Campaign

As a campaign, the isolated location becomes one of the main features of the game world. An example would be a campaign set on board a spaceship, making a long journey between worlds, or on a small island without sea travel capability.

In this extreme, the location usually needs to be large to provide realism and enough opportunity for adventure, with many NPCs, although this is not always necessary. The BBC TV show *Red Dwarf* provides an example in which the heroes are the only characters on an immense spaceship, and many adventures take place within its confines. (Some of the episodes involve external excursions, but a good number rely only on internal character interaction.)

Entire campaigns can be built either within the bounds of a restricted setting, such as West End Games' *Paranoia*, set in the computer-controlled confinement of Alpha Complex, or with the goal of escaping the setting, such as in the TV show *The Prisoner*. Further examples of such prison-like campaigns and how to use them can be found in the *Pyramid* article "[Weird Prisons](#)".

The Isolated Adventure

In the middle ground, a restricted location makes a good adventure episode within a longer campaign. Normally the adventurers are mobile and can travel as freely as anyone else, but for some reason they are confined for a period of time. They might be thrown into the microcosm of a prison, where they must make friends, accumulate equipment, and plan and execute their escape.

In ultra-tech campaigns the heroes may be confined by a trip up or down a "beanstalk" -- a long cable connecting a planet to an orbital station. The distance involved is great enough that such a trip usually take a few days, during which the protagonists are stuck in a vehicle hurtling along a thick cable with their fellow passengers, stewards, and whatever operations crew are required.

The classic fantasy dungeon adventure is a good example of both the advantages and problems inherent in isolated adventures. Dungeons can be mapped and cataloged, room by room, so there are few surprises for the prepared GM. The characters can explore at will within the confines of the dungeon, giving them a sense of free choice, and the GM always knows what is around the next corner. Many of the early published dungeon adventures were however unrealistic in that rooms full of monsters existed in a stasis without regard to food (or hygiene) until the heroes blundered into them. Things have thankfully improved and any dungeon-building GM should take heed of such things.

The isolated adventure episode can be used in almost any campaign. If the players are used to being able to travel anywhere they like it can make an interesting change of style. Their characters will have to deal with the restrictions of their location by thinking in different ways and perhaps applying little-used skills. Any game in which the heroes travel long distances can use an adventure within the confines of their vehicle, or in the isolation of the wilderness, to break up a journey or to provide some detail when the travel itself might otherwise be glossed over. Any building, from a castle to an office block, might provide a setting for an entire evening's roleplaying.

The Isolated Scene

At the smallest scale, a confined location can be used to add drama and immediacy to an otherwise mundane scene. When James Bond fought Peter Franks in the movie version of *Diamonds are Forever*, what might have been just another fight scene was made into the most memorable sequence of the film by the fact that they were stuck in a cramped elevator at the time.

Confining your characters to a small space makes them edgy about being attacked or trapped, by cutting off any obvious escape routes. Most individual scenes in an adventure already take place in a finite location, so an even tighter restriction is required to enforce this feeling of confinement. Think of the trash compactor scene from *Star Wars*, or Indiana Jones racing to beat yet another inexorably closing stone door.

Many scenes can be placed in tight settings to increase drama. Imagine a group of characters in a jeep trying to outrun a pack of velociraptors in some anachronistic theme park. Now imagine this happening in the park's underground service tunnels. A plethora of claustrophobic locations can be utilized to spice up scenes in this way: Sewers, bank vaults, elevators, caves, corridors, cable-car cars, crowded shopping malls, castle towers.

Be careful not to use this device too much however. If every scene is played out in the confines of a Ferris wheel cabin or 747 cockpit, things can get cramped and tiring. Some especially dramatic types may enjoy it though!

Using Isolation

A recipe for building an adventure might start with the idea of using an isolated location, either for a change of pace in a free-wheeling campaign, or as a dramatic scene within a greater story. The type of campaign will dictate which locations are suitable. Once an interesting location is chosen, the reason for being confined in it must be decided. This, and plot considerations will determine what NPCs are required. The location might be mapped out and the NPCs detailed, complete with their motivations and actions. This step can take some time, depending on how big the location is and how detailed you like to make your GM's notes. All that is then required is getting everyone to show up on gaming night!

Herge never followed through with his plan for that airport lounge adventure -- unfortunately, he did not finish another book before he died. Perhaps if we take his idea of a microcosm which contains all the essential elements of a good story and develop it in various directions, we can gain inspirations for adventure locations, themes, and plots.

Pyramid Review

Ragnarok! Tales of the Norse Gods (for d20)

Published by [Avalanche Press LTD](#)

Written by William Sariego

Illustrated by Lorenzo Sperlonga & Peggy Gordon

48 pages; \$12.95

The Vikings or the Norsemen have proved a rich vein from which to tap as a source for various RPGs and supplements. These include sourcebooks for systems as diverse as *GURPS*, *AD&D*, *RoleMaster* and third edition *RuneQuest*, plus games such as Atlas Games' recent "smash-tastic" *Rune RPG*. The all-new, all-modern *d20* phenomenon has not ignored the Vikings either, with them being the subject for Avalanche Press' second release, *Greenland Saga - The Lost Norse Colony*. This, like their first release, *The Last Days of Constantinople*, was a historically based adventure, but while they return to the subject of Vikings for their third book, Avalanche Press have written something a little different.

Ragnarok! Tales of the Norse Gods is not just historically based, but rather a campaign sourcebook upon the historical myths of the Vikings. What it offers is not a game in which our players take on the roles of Viking warriors -- though they can -- but instead provides a framework in which the players become Norse gods themselves.

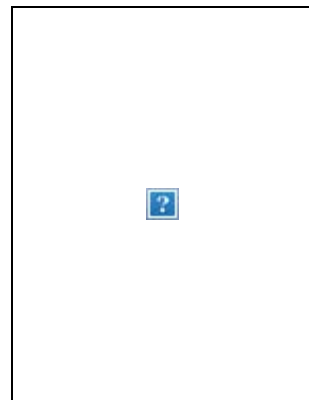
The first thing that strikes you about *Ragnarok!* is its cover. Indeed, this cover recently won a "Buzzie," or a 2001 RPGnet Award for the most gratuitous cover. Take another look; that cover *is* gratuitous . . . there were hopes that the days of the chainmail bikini and cheesecake had died with 1st Edition, if not 2nd Edition *AD&D*. Not so, because here Avalanche Press revives the tradition, but with strips of leather instead of chainmail.

Like the previous releases from Avalanche Press, this book is light on art and heavy on text. The layout is organized in a perfunctory manner, with just a single box of text that has wandered into the adjacent column. There is a lot of boxed text, with any falling under the Open Gaming License being marked with different pattern on the box's border.

As the title suggests, *Ragnarok! Tales of the Norse God* has as its subject matter, the "Doom of the Gods" foreseen by Odin in a vision. Though he does not fully understand what he saw, he knows that it spells the end of both the Aesir and the Vanir. Eventually Loki's jealousy of his nephew, Balder, will drive him to murder the brightest of all the gods, and this will allow order to slip away as the forces of chaos strike at Midgard. Yet Odin counsels that these events have yet to pass and may not yet do so at all! All that the gods can do is prevent the onset of Ragnarok . . . and this is where the players come in.

In *Ragnarok! Tales of the Norse Gods* the players take on the roles of Lesser Gods, whose worship has passed out of legend and been lost . . . actually immortal high-level D&D characters that each serve one of the Greater Gods in the Norse pantheon. In addition, they can also play ordinary mortal Viking warriors, and on occasion, the Greater Gods as well. Adventures take the form of quests, which if successfully completed can help forestall Ragnarok.

A player's choice of Greater God determines much about a Lesser God -- particularly their class and starting levels, as well as their favored attribute. Thus if Uller was chosen as a Greater God, a Lesser God could be a ranger of not more than 14th level as Uller is himself 15th level. Likewise, a Lesser God of Frey could not be more than an 11th level fighter and a 6th level sorcerer. The only Greater God that cannot be chosen is Odin, who remains the province of the "High Skald" as the GM is termed here. Lesser Gods gain attributes of not less than twenty, enhanced hit points,



damage reduction, spell resistance, the ability to travel between the Nine Worlds and cast Runes (a new form of magic particular to Norse myth), limited immortality and Divinity Points (the equivalent of luck or hero points in **Ragnarok!**) In addition, each Lesser God possesses a single magical item particular to them, in what is a low-level magical setting. Lesser Gods are invariably male and of the human -- or rather "divine" -- race, nor can they be of evil alignment. [*Editor's note: actually, the rules state that no party may be composed of more females than males.*] This combines with all of the feats and skills granted from creating a normal character up to the agreed level, to make each Lesser God very tough indeed. Perhaps a munchkin's dream? . . .

Should ordinary, mere mortal heroes be required from among the Lesser Gods, all **D&D** races are available, except the Half-Orc, which are renamed the Trollborn, and the gnome and halfling, which are unavailable. Any class can be selected, except for the martial artist monk, which would be anachronistic, and the paladin, as this class is restricted to the god Balder only. Together with the choice of Greater God and their Lesser God, a player's mortal hero slips into what is known as their Divine Portfolio.

There are several new feats and skills in **Ragnarok! Tales of the Norse God**. These include the feats of Weapon Catching (upon the edge of the shield, no less) and Weapon Expertise: Hurl Spear. The new skills are Charioteering, Hurl Axe, and the all important skill of Runecraft. This allows Lesser Gods to use Norse Rune magic, the knowledge of which was originally won by Odin and is used by all of the gods to shape the universe. Lesser Gods begin the campaign with knowledge of one of the runes known by their Greater counterpart per character level, out of the twenty-four available. Each Rune has both a beneficial and a baneful effect. For example, the "Elloh" or defense rune can increase a target's Armor Class by two or reduce it by two.

A **Ragnarok** campaign takes place across the Nine Worlds, but mainly on Midgard itself. This is made up of five kingdoms roughly analogous to the Viking view of Europe. The Northern Kingdom equates to Scandinavia, the Western Kingdom to France, the Eastern to Russia, and so on. In addition there are several islands to the west that are dominated by the druids. Each kingdom, as well as the other eight worlds, is given a good description, with a focus upon the major inhabitants and military forces. Religion plays an important role in a **Ragnarok!** campaign as the Southern Kingdom is very forthright in proselytizing its own monotheistic faith that holds Odin to be the All-Father and does not accept any other gods except his junior partner, Frigga and their son Balder.

A default campaign, "Wolf Time," is provided to get the High Skald started. A variety of adventure types are discussed, with the advice that the dungeon-type is highly inappropriate to the setting. Four Quest Seeds are outlined, with one suitable each for mortal heroes and Greater Gods, the other two designed for use with Lesser Gods. The players begin the game with three Fate Points, which indicate how close the Nine Worlds are to the onset of Ragnarok. Should this score reach zero, then the end time has come . . . The players are thus attempting to raise the number of Fate Points through the completion of quests, but can also lose them through failure to complete them or even through the death of a god. There are rewards to be as the number of points rise, but Ragnarok! Tales of the Norse God is a fatalistic game and the Doom of the Gods cannot be forestalled forever.

Written by a noted authority upon the Norse sagas and religion, **Ragnarok! Tales of the Norse God** is an interesting approach to running a **d20** campaign. It approaches the style of troupe play, and an interesting option might be to have players control characters in different Divine Portfolios, rather than have characters all from the same one. Except for Odin, no Greater God is given full **d20** statistics, and it is suggested that both the referee and players decided upon the particulars for each one. Of course, long time gamers might like to consult their copies of the **Deities & Demigods** or **Legends & Lore** supplements for their statistics under previous editions of **AD&D**. Likewise any of the Viking supplements listed above should prove useful to the referee.

Ragnarok! Tales of the Norse God is perhaps the most interesting and useable sourcebook to be released by Avalanche Press to date. It should provide the referee looking to get something more out of the **d20** System with somewhere to start a campaign, whereas their previous scenarios were rather limited in the long term. Likewise, there is no reason -- except for the mechanics and statistics -- that a GM of the **Rune RPG** could not also use this book as a campaign framework.

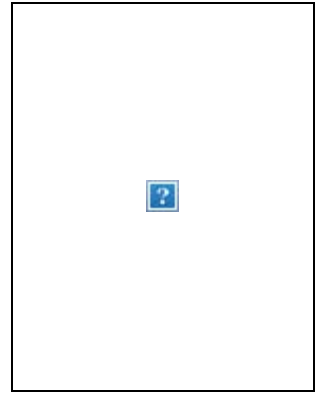
--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Target: Awakened Lands (for Shadowrun)

Published by FanPro

Written by Rob Boyle, Martin Gotthard, Eleanor Holmes, Steve Kenson and Shane Winzar



128 pages; \$18

God, those FanPro guys are sneaky. Sneaky, sneaky, sneaky.

Picture this terrifying, yet real-life, scenario. FanPro tells you "we're gonna release a sourcebook for *Shadowrun* with all these cool magically active places!" And you go "woot!" Why, I don't know. It's a strange sound, to be honest, but there you go. "Woot!"

So, you stroll down to your Friendly Local Game Store and pick up *Target: Awakened Lands*.

You go home, uncork some Dew De Montagne '01, and begin to peruse.

But wait! This isn't a sourcebook on magically awaked places! Okay, it kind of is, but Not All of It! No, this is a sourcebook on that most strange and exotic of locations: Australia!

Okay, so it isn't bad that they've finally done a sourcebook for Australia in *Shadowrun*. It's a nice place (when it isn't on fire, mind you). They've contributed so much to international culture (Midnight Oil, Nicole Kidman, Russell Crowe, and at least three *Crocodile Dundee* films) and they have a great wilderness that's almost as lethal as Canada's ("almost" by dint of it's mostly warmer).

And they have gotten a lot of short-sticking by many game companies. Since I'm not from there, I can't say there's anything wrong with an Australia sourcebook. But I would hare preferred they say that on the cover. (Okay, so they have an illustration of an Aboriginal and a Koala on the cover, and the back says "Welcome to Australia." So technically it *is* on the cover. It's just not in the title. Ah, heck. I just like to kvetch.)

In fact, after reading the book, my only real complaint is it tries to do a tetch too much, and ends up doing not enough.

The Australia info is done in standard *Shadowrun* format. There's IC info, with IC debate on it. It gives us the SOTU on Australia and New Zealand in 2061 (the two states merged in 2022, forming ANZAC). Of course, there's shockingly little info on NZ in the SB, as it seems to focus mostly on mainland Australia.

The book opens with a short section on the Manascape of the *Shadowrun* universe, with descriptions of Mana storms, Mana Ebbs and Flares, and a variety of astral phenomena.

Australia in the *Shadowrun* universe is being wracked with Mana storms, huge expressions of magical energy that wreak havoc across the terrain. I don't know how much of this was covered in the main *Shadowrun* rules (What's it say in my copy? That's a good question. If I could get it back, I'd tell you), but I'm going to assume this was mentioned as a fact of life for the Aussies. Mostly, they rumble across the outback, wreaking havoc in the inner part of the country, leaving the coastal cities alone. Except, of course, Sydney, which has a huge Mana Storm parked over it.

The info on Australia is pretty good, although fairly brief. You get a sense of each city (I like Brisbane, a town that

sounds a lot like *Cheers*, with Everyone Knowing your Name), but I think more info could have been had on the various job opportunities for Shadow runners to be found in each metropolis. It seems as if the assumption is that most of the work will be in the interior, which is where a lot of words are spent.

[SPOILER ALERT]

Sydney is given a decent going over. The Sydney Harbour Bridge was shattered, and has been squatted on, much like San Francisco in Gibson's *All Tomorrow's Parties*. I loved that fictional setting, and it's great that we can now play somewhere very similar in *Shadowrun*.

The various crime concerns that make Australia their home (gotta love a country where the Ethnic mob is Greek, eh?) are described. There's the standard Mafia, Yakuza, Triads and Tongs. There are also outback crawling biker gangs, if you're getting nostalgic for the time when Mel Gibson didn't want to be taken so dang seriously.

There's stuff aplenty on the outback. The Aborigines and their magical traditions are discussed in a pair of articles. I don't know how authentic it is, but it certainly reads well. The magical traditions of the Aborigines are described in *Shadowrun* terminology; since they use Totems quite strongly, naturally they follow a shamanic tradition.

The aboriginal shamanic tradition is discussed. There are discussions of the songlines they use to travel the outback, the use of blood and animal bits in their craft, the dreamtime, and their totems.

The magicscape of the outback is looked at, discussing the temper of the local spirits. The various magical phenomena of the outback are also discussed, from the seeming constant mana storms to the Alchera, which seem to be magical oases that drift in and out of existence.

Another good section is the various paranimals that inhabit the outback. My favorite? Well, since they don't include the ghost of a naturalist, ripped apart by crocodiles, I'll have to go for a Drop Bear, which is a carnivorous Koala infected with Human Metahuman Vampiric Virus. A vampire Koala. Funny, yet terrifying, although for some reason it still requires eucalyptus. There are also magically active Dingoes, who won't attack adults, but will come into inhabited places and steal unattended children. If you're not careful, dingoes will Eat Your Baby. So you gotta be careful.

The various magical places, including the Great Barrier Reef (which has the world's largest Merrow civilization inhabiting it), Ayers Rock, and Kakadu rainforest, among others. There's also info on the magical threats in Australia, including secret societies, toxic shamans, and bug hives.

Bug hives are shelters from the mana storms, so one can only imagine the dramatic possibilities inherent in seeking safe haven from a storm in a hive; to mix metaphors, any harbor in a storm may be leaping from the frying pan into the fire.

The book also contains a short tour of other magically active places in the world of Shadowrun. You get a quick rundown on Mt. Kilimanjaro, Egypt (finally), Chicago (post Bug City), the Nazca lines in Peru, and Dunvegan Castle (the home of Clan Mcleod, and the resting place of its fabled Clan Banner) in the Sixth World. Each of these places has a certain amount of interesting stuff going on. They get a certain amount of short shrift by being appended to the main body of the book.

Following that, all the neat stuff talked about in the previous section of the book is given stats; it's fairly thorough, although we don't get game explanations for everything.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The only quibble I have with the book (since I'm not a psychic Australian, and hence cannot say "that's not what Australia will be like in 61 years if magic returns!") is that it seems as if two good ideas ("Australia" and "Awakened Places") were jammed into one. The book could have easily added another 64 pages or so to its length, or have been cleft in twain, with an Australia book and a proper *Target: Awakened Lands*.

The information given is good, mind you. If you want to run a game set in Australia, this is a great place to start (provided you don't mind jumping to Fodors shortly afterwards). If you just want info on strange magic happenings and the assorted magical places, it won't be quite as sparkling a buy for you.

--*Justin Mohareb*

Pyramid Pick

De Profundis

Published by [Hogshead Publishing](#)

Written by Michal Oracz

Translated from Polish by Maja Apollonia Pica

Cover Artwork by Dennis Detwiler

32 pages; \$6.95

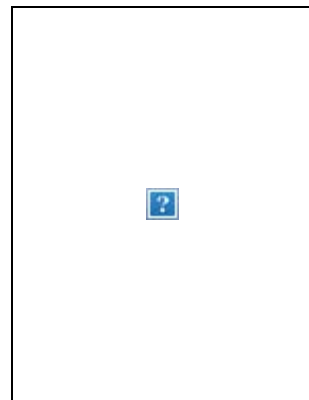
De Profundis, subtitled "Letters from the Abyss," is part of Hogshead Publishing's "New Style" line of roleplaying and storytelling games. Like its companions in the series, *De Profundis* proposes a unique new way to explore the boundaries of the roleplaying hobby and to create fascinating stories. Unlike a few of its forebears of the New Style, it also makes for truly fun gaming.

The goal of *De Profundis* is to replicate the horror stories of H.P. Lovecraft through a style of roleplaying the author calls "psychodrama." Psychodrama, in this context, is a fancy word for storytelling without rules and without a gamemaster. While the book gives rules for plain psychodrama (simply -- taking turns in a dark room cooperatively narrating a story in which you play yourself), the heart of *De Profundis* employs "correspondence psychodrama" as its primary format. Translation: *De Profundis* is played out in letters -- hand-written and in-character -- shared between two participants and posted through the regular mail.

Correspondence psychodrama is rules-free and GM-less, but this doesn't mean it is entirely without strictures or focus. What *De Profundis* does is exchange rules for the epistolary format, which brings with it some significant restrictions and qualifiers. Coupled with the requirements of the Lovecraftian genre, letter-writing in *De Profundis* has as sturdy of a framework as any comparable game. The by-product of this framework is a series of evocative, deeply introspective compositions telling a story whose path and conclusion -- like the tales of Lovecraft's narrators -- could never be foreseen by the storytellers themselves.

It is an ingenious concept for roleplaying that's probably been done before, but never turned into a full game in itself. It is also uniquely suited to the horror genre and the Lovecraftian setting specifically. Those who thoughtfully enjoy both Lovecraft's stories and the *Call of Cthulhu RPG* will recognize that the action-oriented play of *Call of Cthulhu* often feels dissimilar to the atmospheric, internally focused monologues of Lovecraft's prose. Such monologues, as *De Profundis* astutely points out, are particularly capable of expressing the metaphysical and psychological horror of the Mythos as well as the gradual disintegration of the psyche that encounters it. Compared with the summary of a *Call of Cthulhu* campaign, a *De Profundis* plotline would probably more resemble in tone, scope, and pacing an actual Lovecraft story. Even more compelling is the fact that playing *De Profundis* leaves you with all the contents of the game in concrete form (you save all the letters, of course), so that you basically have a Lovecraftian short story, in toto, when you're done.

The book's text *is*, itself, a Lovecraftian short story . . . though it's perhaps more precise to call it the result of a fictional session of *De Profundis*. The entire contents are written as letters from the game's author to an unknown addressee. The letters detail the discovery of *De Profundis* -- the game itself -- in the authorial narrator's dreamscape and go on to expound upon the mechanics as a way of bringing the game out of its ethereal trappings and into the world for people to play. The effects on the narrator of grappling with the game and its Mythos-touched source are



mixed in with a more straightforward explanation of exactly how to play. It's similar to the color fiction presented in many recent RPGs except, that it is somehow both interspersed liberally among the game material and also surprisingly unobtrusive. If nothing else, it is competently written in an atmospheric style more-than-reminiscent of Lovecraft's. And considering that *De Profundis* was originally written in Polish and then translated to English by Hogshead, I'm tempted to call it the best game fiction I've had the pleasure of reading.

There's an even more pleasant surprise to be found in *De Profundis*, however, and that is how remarkably practical and helpful it is in terms of actually running a De Profundis campaign. Considering that it is a 32-page, rules-free, non-conventional roleplaying game translated from Polish and written entirely in-character as real-life correspondence, it is stupendously playable. And it's not playable despite these factors; it's arguably more playable because of them. The text is not only interesting fiction coupled with an explanation of game mechanics, it is also an example of play!

Far more than that, the topics covered in the text are full of eminently practical advice for playing De Profundis. They address how to write in a Lovecraftian style; how to keep correspondence between two players from turning into two disassociated plotlines; how to integrate *De Profundis* into a *Call of Cthulhu* campaign; how to maintain a suspension of disbelief for all players; and even how to use expressive handwriting for emotive effect. *De Profundis* outlines the fundamental differences in engaging in a letter-writing campaign set in the 1920s and one set in 2002. It gives tips for playing yourself, a *Call of Cthulhu*-style investigator, or a protagonist - even antagonist -- straight from one of Lovecraft's works.

What this all boils down to is that *De Profundis* is a New Style game that wants to be played, not just read. Like another New Style game, *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, all De Profundis requires is an open mind about what constitutes roleplaying and a willingness to immerse yourself in the game's requisite style.

There is another way *De Profundis* compares to the other New Style games that deserves mention. Warnings sprinkled on the game's cover and title page declare that *De Profundis* is only for "mentally stable adults." Arguably, this is true of any RPG, but when *De Profundis* stands next to New Style games like *Power Kill and Violence*, one starts to see a trend in Hogshead's direction with the series. Still, the disclaimer seems more like marketing (and maybe a touch of liability avoidance) than a true warning. For one thing, unlike *Power Kill and Violence*, De Profundis is meant to be played and played safely.

Still, there may be good reason for the warning, since *De Profundis* does spend the last eighth of its pages taking the basic concept a step or two further than it necessarily needed to. The last two chapters, entitled "Phantasmagoria" and "The Hermitage," go from logical extension of basic play to mechanically nonsensical, albeit fictionally interesting, near-psychosis. Since a little more than half of the game's rules for correspondence psychodrama involve playing yourself -- today, and in real time -- and also call for a tone of internal struggle and self-transformation, "Phantasmagoria" postulates a reasonable corollary to this style of play. It is called "field psychodrama." Really what it constitutes is a practice that a modern day *De Profundis* campaign requires: looking at the world around you with an eye towards what horrible Lovecraftian things might be seething beneath the surface and letting your imagination extrapolate your observations into fodder for letter-writing. Sure, calling this a "state of controlled paranoia, or schizophrenia" is a bit inflammatory while maybe even being accurate. But what is really being described is something roleplayers do as a matter of course (and Kenneth Hite does with obsessive zeal), not something dangerous to a normal mind.

In keeping with the fictional concept behind the book, field psychodrama is explained in parallel to the author/narrator's own mental decline. But it really doesn't go too far -- at least, not far enough to warrant Hogshead's melodramatic disclaimers. Arguably, "The Hermitage" does cross a line by showing a player of the game (the narrator) who has failed to maintain a distinction between fiction and reality. Still, it's mainly attributable to the premise of the book's story, not to any probable extension of the game's mechanics in real life, no matter how much they push toward meta-game considerations. In the earlier chapters of *De Profundis*, the narrator talks about how to approach the critical denouement of a campaign: "a clever reader should be able to detect a change in the correspondent, detect that something is wrong, from their handwriting, choice of words, various nuances." In keeping with the idea that the game's text is also an example of play, "The Hermitage" is really just an illustration of this segment of gameplay. As such, it is really harmless fiction with no conceivable lessons to the player, regardless of Hogshead's implications,

about how to possibly use roleplaying games to achieve psychosis.

More than any Hogshead release since *Baron Munchausen, De Profundis* succeeds in what the publisher declares is the purpose of the New Style line: to be "innovative, genre-defying narrative games." While *Power Kill and Violence* are more cynical (though perhaps educational) thought-experiments, *De Profundis* -- with its impressively clear and practical content -- manages to be what Hogshead purports it to be: a game. Yes, it's a game that plays unlike any other. Yes, it's a game with a theoretically interesting lack of boundaries. But in the end, what's important is that it's a game, both playable and fun. It evokes the spirit and style of H.P. Lovecraft with unrivaled ingenuity and gives gamers a new format in which to explore their hobby. Not bad for 32 pages.

--*Christopher Patrick Floyd*

The Unexplored of the Rings

"IN ORBIT WITHIN THE RINGS OF SATURN, WE SEE A BLACK, MILE LONG, GEOMETRICALLY PERFECT RECTANGLE, THE SAME PROPORTIONS AS THE BLACK ARTIFACT EXCAVATED ON THE MOON.

For two million years, it had circled Saturn, awaiting a moment of destiny that might never come. In its making, the moon had been shattered and around the central world, the debris of its creation orbited yet -- the glory and the enigma of the solar system."

-- Effects note and closing narration, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1965 screenplay)

In a scientific universe, wonder must have a scientific gloss, if not necessarily a scientific content. The dragons and gods of the ancients must reshape themselves, as spaceships and wavefronts and energy fields. And, like the dragons of the old age, who were confidently placed only in the blank corners of the map, our pseudo-scientific monsters also live far away from us -- hundreds of millions of miles away, ideally. If we travel far enough, and the data are murky enough, we can still see the Beast Leviathan, churning up an electromagnetic wake in the rings of Saturn.

"A second close-up of Saturn containing suprisingly important information . . . reveals salient features of an operational electromagnetic vehicle. A component is identifiable readily as the nose orifice. Extending from below the orifice is a long, tightly twisted tongue. The top longitudinal-profile body element is perceptible for a short distance aft of the nose. Location of the bottom longitudinal-profile body element is obscured inasmuch as a solid band of under-body emissions, exhausts where this element otherwise would appear. The distance between these two locations establishes an approximate body diameter, and permits estimation of trailing-end location. When a 13 to 1 fineness ratio is used for length estimation, the trailing-end lies just beyond the furthest aft body-attached streamer. Back at the nose a bi-lateral projection can be identified extending on each side. Branch streamers rise from this projection and flow centrally to form a large-overhead annulus. Secondary streamers flow into this annulus from in- and out-board of the body. . . . The electromagnetic character of these phenomena is affirmed by presence of nodules, on streamers just aft of the annulus. These nodules, being visual properties of pinched plasmas, are indicative of electromagnetic interactions."

-- Norman Bergrun, *The Ringmakers of Saturn* (1996)

Well, maybe *we* can't. But NACA and later Lockheed aerodynamicist Norman Bergrun sure can. Starting in 1980, with the Voyager 1 photographs of Saturn's rings, Bergrun began examining NASA imagery with what can only be described as fanatical attention. He was struck (as many NASA scientists were) by the incredible intricacy and detail of the rings, and believed that he saw major changes and bodies appear and disappear in shots taken five minutes apart. He began using microscopes to enlarge the photographs to (or even beyond) the limits of the imaging optics, and then combing through, and refining, the resulting shots with computer software and other optical tools. He spotted anomalous blobs of light, often on the edges of the ring photos, and detected other ellipses and spindles in the rings where conventional wisdom saw nothing. Bergrun even began to determine that some of the rings were "unfinished," not completing a full orbit of the planet yet, or were too narrow to be accounted for by standard orbital dynamics. Finally, in 1996, he announced his discoveries to the world in the book *Ringmakers of Saturn*. Enormous EMV (electromagnetic vehicle) alien spacecraft -- some of them longer than three Earth diameters -- were producing Saturn's rings, most likely as "exhaust" from their mining or monitoring orbits around that planet. Others ("only" fifteen or so miles long) were flitting around Saturn's moons; still others had landed on our own Moon, where they made all manner of new, exciting [shadow anomalies](#) of their own.

"The specialist did try to talk me down. He said that on plate five, the picture had been 'cut off', and that's why I couldn't trace the ring."

-- Norman Bergrun, *Fortean Times* interview (2000)

In actual likelihood, sadly, Bergrun's EMVs are a combination of light smear at the edges of the photos, optical shadows and other tricks of the camera and eye, or artifacts of his almost comically intense and arcane magnification and enhancement processes. In matters like this, you can also always count on good old pareidolia, the same neurological quirk that finds faces on Mars or Jesus in a tortilla. His spotting efforts aren't made any easier by the

EMVs' "tendency to hide," as he puts it, although in one interview he has seemed optimistic about the possibility of reshooting the rings with [Kirlian photography](#). Enthusiasts have been strangely loath to embrace Bergrun's Ringmaker EMVs, possibly because Saturn is a little too far, and possibly because pyramids on Mars are just sexier. One does occasionally get mysterious government sources like "Sherman" admitting to U.S. government knowledge of a "massive alien relay station" around Saturn, and British remote viewer Angela Thompson has spied on the "mining operations" of the Ringmaker EMVs for the Defense Intelligence Agency, but largely even the Men In Black seem to leave Saturn to its own devices.

"Even more amazing, in my opinion, is that Galileo, while he was able to resolve the slight phase of Mars, was unable to resolve the major ring around Saturn. Mars is a difficult object in a small telescope, while Saturn is easily resolved as a ringed planet in even a 40-mm spotting scope at 30X. Why did the rings of Saturn elude Galileo, while the more difficult Martian phases did not? Perhaps at the time of Galileo the rings of Saturn were much more difficult to observe than they are today."

-- Geophysicist Karl Fabian, September 9, 1988

This is kind of a shame, because Saturn (considered correctly) is quite the happening place for High Weirdness. In 1789, William Herschel tracked any number of anomalous lights around Saturn while discovering Mimas and Enceladus (two inner moons of the planet), and finally decided they must be intense fires, since they could be nothing else. Astronomers have tracked Saturn's Great White Spot for centuries, generally assuming it to be a large atmospheric storm like Jupiter's Great Red Spot -- but there have been a disturbing number of White Spot sightings in the rings rather than on the planet, and even more of the White Spot moving against the planet's rotation! Saturn emits one and three quarters the energy that the Sun radiates to it; physicists assume there is some kind of spontaneous gravitic helium fusion in the planet's atmosphere accounting for the effect -- but it might be EMV power grids. (Those power grids may work through [sacred geometry](#) based on Saturn's anomalous hexagonal cloud "hole" at the planet's north pole.) Over and above the increasingly tangled and convoluted rings, Saturn's moons are a real handful as well. Titan's elliptical orbit should be impossible, given its surface heat and tides from Saturn's gravity -- unless Titan was "built" within the last few million years. Many of Saturn's moons show only one "umbilical" crater, looking for all the world like the neck of a balloon; did Someone "blow up" a bunch of hollow moons for Saturn, perhaps as EMV hangars? The moon Dione has even shown clouds, of all things, despite being far too small and cold for such hijinks.

"I have a note upon a determined luminosity that was bent upon Saturn, as its objective. . . . [A] correspondent writes that, upon July 13, 1896, he saw, through his telescope, from 10 until after 11:15 p.m., after which the planet was too near to the horizon for good seeing, a luminous object moving near Saturn. He saw it pass several stars. 'It was certainly going toward Saturn at a good rate.' There may be swifts of the sky that can board planets."

-- Charles Fort, *New Lands*

Searching the relevant documents, one also sees a few significant conjunctions with Saturn in the UFOlogical sphere. Fort cites a luminous UFO sighting near Saturn in 1896 (the year of the [Great Airship Mystery](#), I'll point out). In 1975, Soviet astronomer Sergei Bozhich announced that, based on Soviet space tracking data, most UFOs leaving Earth (or leaving Russia, at least) headed for Saturn, where they likely therefore had a base. Oddly fascist-inflected contactee George Adamski was taken to Saturn by his "Nordic" alien friends (to meet with President Kennedy, as it turned out), which resonates eerily with the two humanoid aliens from Saturn who telepathically spoke in "High German" to contactee Reinhold Schmidt in 1957. Have the [Antarctic Space Nazis](#) branched out into the icy Saturnian system? Beginning and ending with Fort for proper circularity, the gigantic EMVs recall Fort's beloved [Monstrator](#), a "super-Zeppelin" (shades of the Great Airship!) 100,000 miles long seen crossing the sun by two independent observers in 1762.

*"But when good Saturn, banish'd from above,
Was driv'n to Hell, the world was under Jove
Then summer, autumn, winter did appear:
And spring was but a season of the year.
The sun his annual course obliquely made,
Good days contracted, and enlarg'd the bad.
Then air with sultry heats began to glow;*

*The wings of winds were clogg'd with ice and snow;
And shivering mortals, into houses driv'n,
Sought shelter from th' inclemency of Heav'n.."*
-- Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Dryden translation)

And so we remain, looking dreamily upward at these planet-sized forms cruising between Saturn and Earth, recalling the monolith that Arthur C. Clarke placed in the rings before special-effects considerations dethroned Saturn in favor of Jupiter. Do these monoliths, also, hold our species' heritage, perhaps left over from the days when, as modern catastrophism maintains, the Earth orbited Saturn itself? This would explain, albeit not without some cost to Occam's Razor, why primitive man worldwide identified the otherwise faint and uninteresting planet Saturn with the first king of heaven. It could explain why, both in the Kabbalah and in Babylonian astrology, the Sun and Saturn can be interchanged. It might also explain why, in the mythological "Age of Saturn," the Earth's climate was permanently stable and springlike; evidence of either tidal and axial locking, or of Dione-style terraforming to keep Earth pleasant until Monstrator could clean out our world's new orbital home around the Sun. Or was Monstrator hurried along, perhaps by some unthinkable war around Saturn between titanic EMV leviathans? Did our [ancient astronaut](#) ancestors retreat with the Earth from some cosmic Dunkirk, rescued from an enormous, inhuman prowling evil held back only by Monstrator -- and the Defense Intelligence Agency? Have the Antarctic Space Nazis sold our planet out to its ancient oppressors; has the time come again for Saturn to devour his children? A billion miles away, Saturn watches and waits, building its rings with unthinkable power -- to bring us all back, and in the darkness bind us to him again forever.

My Campaign is Not a Number!

(Okay; Maybe It Is. . .)

Well, this marks both the 200th electronic issue of *Pyramid* and my 100th issue. Of course, that's somewhat less spectacular when you're a weekly type of publication (as we have been for over three years), but as an avid comic collector I still get giddy at nice evenly divisible numbers. And by my math we should be overtaking *Dragon Magazine's* number system in 28 months (19 months if you count the 30 paper issues of *Pyramid*). Set your calendar now!

To tie this into gaming, I've wondered what affect it has to "number" or otherwise codify a roleplaying session. For example, in most comic book universes, they like to call big evenly divisible numbers (like 100, 50, or even 25), "milestone" or "anniversary" issues, and the publishing houses generally like to save Big Things -- like big storylines, new creative teams, or big team shakeups -- for those issues. And lately even television shows have gotten into the act by making big deals and events of 100th, 200th, or other big evenly divisible numbers. (I've always waited for a show to make its "Big 100th Syndication-Ensuring Easy Cash Celebration" Episode . . .)

So why can't games do the same -- or similar -- things?

First off, it means codifying what an "issue" or "episode" of a game is. In some game worlds this is pretty easy; my *Star Trek* miniseries, for example, was very episodic . . . to the extent that I printed up sheets with each week's title on them to show my players after the episode's pre-credits "teaser." Likewise my friend Matt used to plot his Supers campaigns around issue names and numbers. In other games this may mean specifically rethinking your campaign's focus or conventions. For example, a World War II game that wants a comic-book or episodic feel will probably require restructuring so that it's more like *Black Sheep Squadron* instead of *Saving Private Ryan*. For campaign groups that don't meet that often, it might mean saying that each meeting is really two or more "issues."

Second off, you need to let your players know what you're up to. This can be as simple as telling them you're numbering "issues" or "episodes," or as complex as you want it. You might tell your players the installment's name, either before or after the adventure; you might even make the players come up with the name for the issue once they're done. (I've done that before in a Supers game; it's a lot of fun to see the players try to distill the essence of the adventure down to one title. The one that springs most readily to mind ended up being called, "Caught Between Iraq and a Hard Point" . . .) If you have any players with artistic talent, get them to do cover sketches for each adventure; *that* will be a campaign memento for everyone to drool over.

You might start organizing adventures based on the numbering system ("Captain Dan was last seen alive in #27 . . ."). If the players get into the convention, they may even start offering their own ideas into how to further advance the idea. (For example, one might say, "Well, we've got episode 50 coming up soon; I'd like my character to propose during that one.")

Now, the biggest question is probably *why* you'd want to go to this trouble. Well, the biggest reason is that it's an easy way to give the campaign an extra structure, and, perhaps more importantly, a different flavor. It can be challenging to try to differentiate, say, one fantasy campaign from another. But as soon as you make your new campaign episodic or following some "comic book" conventions, you open up new possibilities. Your players would know that something fairly big will happen in adventure #50 . . . but what? The anticipation can make them interested. Following a numbering convention can also make you shake up your notions. Rather than just letting adventures happen haphazardly yet organically, what if you knew that every 25 adventures or so you'd be expected to "shake things up" . . . even if those shake-ups are only temporary?

I've dug up some of my old notes for a Supers campaign I never ended up running fully; here are some transcribed bits that may be of interest.

- #1: Introduce heroes, nemesis
- #12: "One year" mark; public challenge of group's "reason for being"?
- #25: Moon disappears; heroes must discover what's going on, "recover" it
- #50: Nemesis dies; government investigates death (?)
- #51-55: Nemesis failsafe plan from beyond the grave
- #75: New pretender to Nemesis identity?
- #100: Team disbands (is forced to disband?) . . . possible new series, or paving way to 101.

Yes, I had a rough plan for how I wanted the campaign to go 100 adventures into the future (even before I had a name for the nemesis . . .). Of course, I was prepared to change that "timeline" if the heroes did anything wildly different . . . but since the players liked being passive for the most part, I knew I had a reasonable shot at using this material. Now, with that much planning in advance, I suddenly had a number of realizations. First, foreshadowing was much easier now, since I had something to foreshadow *to*; if the government is going to be problematic in #50, then I can start having them be problematic from the beginning, knowing when it will culminate. Perhaps more importantly, but structuring such that I knew what the "big" issue numbers were, I also knew I wouldn't upstage myself; if saving the moon was going to be the biggest event of the first 25 adventures, then I couldn't have them save the galaxy in #17.

Probably the biggest hazard of this method is that the heroes may well feel (not incorrectly) that they are being railroaded . . . or at least have the possibility of being railroaded. After all, if the heroes know that, no matter what, something spectacular will happen in seven adventures, that may dampen their enthusiasm somewhat. Again, it depends on the players and their preferences; talk to them ahead of time and see if they'd have a problem with a more structured campaign.

But if not, then maybe you'll find a new lens through which to view a favorite genre or campaign setting.

* * *

Well, alas my illness has *not* gone away, despite my best efforts. So now I've bitten the bullet and gone to a health care facility, where I am on antibiotics, cough syrup, and an inhaler. I also have incentive to get better; if I don't when my antibiotics run out (seven days left, currently), then I have pneumonia or bubonic plague or something, and need to go to the E.R. where they will shoot me. To paraphrase *MST3K*, that's what I get for combing my hair with rat bones.

The upshot of this is that I'm still woefully behind on lots of stuff; I'm trying to catch up, but given how little usable coherent consciousness I've had lately, it's going to take a while. For those of you who have been waiting on email responses, slushpile info, or other stuff, I thank you for your patience. If you need a more immediate response, I recommend trying to track me down in the *Pyramid* [chat room](#); when I'm home and conscious, I can usually be tracked down there.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Rune RPG**, p. 15.*

(Four stars) "A Basilisk moves one square at a time, either ahead diagonally or vertically or backward vertically. It captures by forward movement only. A Basilisk also has the unique ability of "freezing" an opposing piece -- but not a friendly piece -- located directly above it on the middle board, such that the opposing piece cannot move until the Basilisk is moved or captured."

Scale and Lamellar Armor

by Dan Howard

Continues our in-depth examination and discussion of low-tech armor. This week concentrates on scale and lamellar armors. This is intended to clarify and expand upon the brief mention of these armors in *GURPS Basic* and *Low-Tech*, and designed to be used in conjunction with the article "[Armor Damage in GURPS](#)" published on September 7th 2001, and the article "[Chainmail -- Why Bother?](#)" published on September 14th 2001. Those sections discussing armor maintenance, rust-proofing, and armor quality may also be applied here.

Scale Armor (TL1)

Introduction

Scale armor, sometimes called *jazeraint*, is the oldest known type of metal body armor. The initial concept may have been inspired by observing animals such as fish and reptiles. Scale has had a long history of use in Egypt, Asia and the Mediterranean. The earliest records depict Mesopotamian and Sumerian troops in 2500 BC wearing bronze helmets, studded cloaks (see p. LT50) and kilts of scale. Many Assyrian sculptures, show warriors fighting in chariots wearing scale armor. The asiatic Hyksos are believed to have introduced scale into Egypt during the second millennium BC -- Ramses II was depicted wearing it in battle. In the biblical story of David and Goliath, Goliath is described wearing "a helmet of bronze upon his head, and clothed in scale armor, the weight of which was five thousand shekels of bronze." Many Roman sculptures portray officers in fine scale armor. The Bayeux Tapestry depicts figures like Guy, Count of Ponthieu, in a sleeveless scale hauberk.

Scale armor is made of small, thin plates of iron, bronze, or brass usually laced to each other in horizontal rows with leather or wire. Each row is then laced, sewn, or riveted onto a cloth or thin leather backing. Scales are staggered from one row to the next to increase the strength of the armor. Scale can also be fashioned from non-metallic materials such as leather, wood, horn, bone, or even horse's hoof. The Chinese used lacquer for hardening leather scales and laced them together with silk (p. LT49). Treat this type of scale as *Reinforced leather* (PD 2; DR 3; \$120; 12 lbs. see p. LT115).

Well-made scale armor is extremely attractive. The Romans called it *lorica squamata* and it was widely used, especially by cavalrymen and officers, because of its comfort and superior looks. Scale is also lighter, more flexible, and it 'breathes' well compared to more rigid armors, so it is more suitable for warmer climates. Scale is difficult to maintain however. It rusts or tarnishes quickly, is difficult to clean, and can shed scales.

Construction

Low-Tech states that it takes 1 1/2 hours per pound to create standard scale armor (sidebar p. LT44). This figure is for heavy scale. Light scale requires a greater number of scales and takes twice as long (3 hrs/pound). This assumes that two people (possibly an armorer and his apprentice) are working together to fashion the scales, wire or lace them together, and attach the rows to the backing. The smaller the scales, the more that need to be fashioned and the greater the manufacture time. If an armorer is working by himself then manufacturing time is *doubled*.

Types

There are two main types of scale armor, which are dependent upon the size and gauge (thickness) of individual scales. Light scale is more attractive and comfortable, but heavy scale offers better protection. All scale armor is susceptible to impaling attacks from below, however, and thrusting attacks angled upwards reduce the PD (imp.) and DR (imp.) by -1. If the defender is at least three feet higher than the attacker (such as a horseman vs a footsoldier), then any thrusting

attack with a Reach 2 or greater impaling weapon gets this advantage. If both combatants are on the same level, then this sort of attack can only be attempted from within Close Combat. It must be an underhand thrusting attack using a Close Combat impaling weapon (Reach C) such as a dagger.

As mentioned above, scale can shed scales, especially in combat where a sword cut can slice off scales by hitting the rivets or lacing. If the optional [armor damage rules](#) are being used, then any critical hit on scale armor inflicts *one extra* penetration point.

Light scale (p. LT115): Individual scales are fairly small (1/2 to 1 inch wide) and very thin. Their strength comes from the staggered, overlapping rows, and the backing behind them. Light scale is very flexible and can be fashioned into sleeves and leggings enabling all over bodily protection. Manufacture time is 3 hrs/pound. This will be used as the basic armor and modifications can be added when applicable. A corselet protects areas 9-11, 17-18.

Light scale corselet: PD 3 (cut), PD 2 (cr./imp.); DR 4 (cut), DR 2 (cr./imp.); Weight 15 lbs; Cost \$260.

Manufacture time is 3 x 15 = 45 hours.

Other body locations:

Light scale sleeves (areas 6, 8): weight 6 lbs.; cost \$120; manufacture time 18 hrs.

Light scale leggings (areas 12-14): weight 9 lbs.; cost \$180; manufacture time 27 hrs.

Heavy scale (p. B120; p. LT41): This is the metal scale armor as described in **Basic Set** (p. B210) and **Low-Tech** (p. LT41). The scales are larger (up to 3 inches wide) and a heavier gauge than light scale. Heavy scale is also cumbersome and less flexible, so it is difficult to fashion into sleeves or leggings. Because of this, the entries for arm and leg scale armor in **Basic Set** (p. B210) and **Low-Tech** (p. LT116) should be disregarded (use the *Light scale* entries above instead). The shoulders, however, can be extended to protect part of the upper arms. It protects areas 6, 8 (roll 5-6 only). Cost, weight, and manufacture time is +20%. The corselet can also be extended down in the form of a skirt to protect the legs (see *Hauberks*, below). Heavy scale provides PD 3 (cut/cr.), PD 2 (imp.); DR 4 (cut), DR 3 (cr./imp.); Cost is 120%; Weight is 150%; Manufacture time is *half* that of light scale (1 1/2 hours per pound).

Note the weight of heavy scale is much less than that shown in **Basic Set** (p. B210). The scales used by recreationists today are usually heavier than historical examples. All types of scale armor are fairly flexible and because of this, the wearer is susceptible to *Blunt Trauma* (see below).

Augmentations

Several innovations were developed to improve the effectiveness of scale armor.

Medial ridge (TL2): To increase resistance to strong blows each individual scale was embossed along its back with a ridge or crease. The ridge provided extra reinforcing without increasing overall weight. This sort of scale armor was very attractive. It gave the impression of feathers so the Romans called it *lorica plumata*. +1 DR (cr.); +50% to cost and manufacture time; weight is unchanged.

Vertical lacing (TL2): In the 2nd century A.D., the Romans began lacing each scale to its vertical, as well as horizontal, neighbors. Flexibility was compromised slightly for the benefit of increased protection against impaling attacks. +1 DR (imp.); weight is increased a little (+1 lb); cost and manufacture time is +50%. Can only be applied to torso armor.

Scale mail (TL3): Another method of increasing damage resistance is to use *fine-mesh mail* (see the [chainmail](#) article for more on fine-mesh) as a backing instead of cloth or leather. Scale mail combines the best features of both fine-mesh mail and light scale. Its manufacture is extremely labor intensive, however, and without slave labor the cost of production would have been ridiculous. Scale mail offers PD 3 (cut/imp.), PD 2 (cr.); DR 5 (cut/imp.), DR 4 (cr.); cost is 12x; weight is the same as heavy scale; manufacture time is 40 hours per pound. The 'vertical lacing' augmentation mentioned above cannot be performed on this, but 'medial ridge' reinforcement often was. The difficulty and expense

of acquiring scale mail meant that was a kind of status symbol among the upper class. Treat this type of armor as if it had *fine* decoration (see *Decoration*, below).

Below is a breakdown of the described scale types.

Torso (Areas 9-11, 17-18) Description	PD (cut/cr/imp)	DR (cut/cr/imp)	Weight (lbs.)	Cost	Production time
Light scale corselet	3/2/2	4/2/2	15	\$260	45 hrs
medial ridge	3/2/2	4/3/2	15	\$390	68 hrs
vertical lacing	3/2/2	4/2/3	16	\$390	68 hrs
both augmentations	3/2/2	4/3/3	16	\$520	90 hrs
Heavy scale corselet	3/3/2	4/3/3	23	\$310	34 hrs
medial ridge	3/3/2	4/4/3	23	\$465	51 hrs
vertical lacing	3/3/2	4/3/4	24	\$465	51 hrs
Both augmentations	3/3/2	4/4/4	24	\$620	68 hrs
Scale mail corselet	3/2/3	5/4/5	23	\$3120	900 hrs
medial ridge	3/2/3	5/5/5	23	\$4680	1350 hrs

Lamellar (TL2)

Introduction

Lamellar is a form of semi-rigid body armor most often associated with Japanese samurai, but also used by the Byzantines, Romans, Russ and other Dark Age warriors. The Assyrians (900-600 B.C.) are thought to have first developed lamellar armor. It was widely used in the [Byzantine Empire](#) and proved to be very effective. An anecdote recounted by Anna Comnena describes when Alexios took two simultaneous charges from Frankish heavy cavalry and was merely pushed partly off, then back onto his horse without sustaining any injury. The Vikings may also have used lamellar -- archaeological examples have been found at Birka and Gotland (Wisby). It is also possible that some Norman nobility may have worn lamellar at Hastings.

Lamellar consists of small rectangular plates called lames or lamellae, attached to each other with lacing. A more advanced type of scale armor, lamellar differs from scale in four main ways. Firstly the scales are a heavier gauge and overlap each other more. This provides better protection, but the extra metal increases its weight. Secondly, it is assembled in an inverse manner to scale, so it is no longer vulnerable to upward thrusts. Thirdly, the construction is stronger and there is no need to attach it to backing material. Finally, the rows are not staggered, individual lamellae line up vertically as well as horizontally.

Japan

Low-Tech calls Japanese armor *laminated steel* (see p. LT115) to distinguish it from European lamellar armor. This is misleading as Japanese and European lamellar were very similar in both the size of the lamellae and the method of construction. The differences were mainly cosmetic: the shape of the lamellae differed slightly; braided silk lacing was often used instead of leather; and the Japanese almost always lacquered their steel.

As in Europe, Japanese lamellar was usually made from leather or steel. Steel lamellae, called *sane*, were lacquered

both for decoration and to rust-proof them. This was a complicated process involving many layers of different types of lacquer. Because of this, the cost and production time is *triple* that of unlacquered lamellar (treat as *fine* decoration; see the [Chainmail](#) article for more on rustproofing). Sane were then laced into horizontal rows with either leather thong or a flat silk braid -- usually brightly colored -- so that each sane overlapped the one on its right. The horizontal rows were then laced to each other with more leather or silk.

Construction

While producing scale armor is a fairly simple, repetitive operation, manufacturing lamellar is more complicated. The metal must be forged, the plates trimmed to shape, and at least seven holes must be punched or drilled. Individual plates must then be assembled into horizontal rows and those rows linked vertically to make the cuirass. Since lamellar plates are longer than scales, and the finished item is less flexible, the neck and arm openings of the cuirass must be made with specially shaped lames in order to provide the best possible protection while allowing freedom of movement. Lamellar construction takes 2 hours per pound.

As with scale, low-tech armorers could create lamellar from a variety of readily available materials. Archaeological samples of lamellae vary from metals such as steel and bronze, to rawhide, waxed leather, horn, ivory, and whalebone. Lacing materials can range from metal wire, to rawhide or leather thongs, to braided silk or linen cord. Non-metallic lamellar armor should be treated as *Reinforced leather* (PD 2; DR 3; \$120; 12 lbs. see p. LT115).

Types

There were many types of lamellar armor. The shape of the lamellae may have differed but they were all of a similar size. The main difference was the amount of overlap. The greater the overlap, the more lamellae that were required, the heavier the final product, and the better the protection. Lamellar can be split into three general categories -- 'light', 'medium', and 'heavy' -- based on the amount of overlap and the overall weight of the armor.

Light lamellar will be used as the basic armor and modifications can be added when applicable. It was designed to avoid significant overlap and thus greatly reduce the armor's weight, and the number of lamellae required for construction. The Japanese called it *iyozane*. Lamellae only overlap by a small amount -- up to one quarter. Because of its reduced weight and increased flexibility, troops requiring speed and mobility preferred it, although it was susceptible to *blunt trauma* (see below).

Light lamellar cuirass: PD 3 (cut/cr.), PD 2 (imp.); DR 5 (cut/cr.), DR 3 (imp.); Weight 20 lbs; Cost \$560. Protects areas 9-10, 17-18.

Manufacture time is $2 \times 20 = 40$ hours.

Medium lamellar: The most common type of lamellar, the Japanese called it *kozane*. It overlaps by about half the width of the lame -- effectively doubling the thickness of the metal. A special half-lame is added to the end to maintain a constant thickness. +1 PD, +1 DR (imp.). The extra mass of medium lamellar means that the wearer is not susceptible to *blunt trauma* (see below). Cost and weight is 1 1/2 x.

Heavy lamellar: A rare type of lame that is wider than medium lamellar and punched with three rows of vertical holes instead of two. The Japanese called it *shikime zane*. It is assembled in a double overlap, each lame overlaps its neighbor by three-quarters, which effectively triples the thickness of the metal. +1 PD, +1 DR (cut/cr.), +2 DR (imp.). Many more lamellae are required for this than for the construction of light lamellar. It is also very cumbersome -- usually only worn by cavalry. The mass of heavy lamellar means that the wearer is not susceptible to *blunt trauma* (see below). Cost and weight is 2 x.

Note that lamellar armor does not normally cover the lower torso (area 11). This is because most lamellar is not flexible enough to allow enough movement in the waist. In most cases lower torso protection was added separately, usually in the form of some sort of kilt or apron (see *Other Locations*, below). Only light lamellar may be extended down to cover area 11. Add +25% to the weight, cost, and manufacture time.

Modifications

Rigid Lamellar: Sections of lamellar sometimes had extra leather thongs concealed under the lacing to lock the rows together, thus improving their resistance to impaling damage. This was used most often on upper torso armor (areas 9-10, 17-18) because other sections of armor needed more flexibility. +1 PD (imp.); +1 DR (imp.); +25% to cost and manufacture time; weight was slightly increased (+1 lb.). This cannot be applied to light lamellar as the lamellae do not overlap enough.

Below is a table showing the characteristics of various lamellar constructions. A cuirass encases the upper torso, protecting areas 9-10, 17-18.

Upper Torso (Areas 9-10, 17-18) Description	PD (cut/cr/imp)	DR (cut/cr/imp)	Weight (lbs.)	Cost	Production time
Lamellar cuirass, light	3/3/2	5/5/3	20	\$560	40 hrs
Lamellar cuirass, medium	4/4/3	5/5/4	30	\$840	60 hrs
Rigid lamellar cuirass, medium	4/4/4	5/5/5	31	\$1050	75 hrs
Lamellar cuirass, heavy	4/4/3	6/6/5	40	\$1120	80 hrs
Rigid lamellar cuirass, heavy	4/4/4	6/6/6	41	\$1400	100 hrs

Layering Armor

Most warriors, both Japanese and European, wore lamellar layered over a lighter type of armor. Leather and padded cloth were common under-armors. Those who could afford it wore [mail](#) (this would have been the case with Alexios in the anecdote described by Anna Comnena, above). *Low-Tech* states that any armor can be worn over any other, subject to GM approval (see p. LT114). 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 some types of armor the DR varies. To solve this simply average the three DRs.

Light lamellar: $(5 + 5 + 3)/3 = 13/3 = 4.33$.

Because it exceeds 3 but is less than 6, there is a DX reduction of -1 if it is worn under another type of armor.

Other Locations

Lower Abdomen Protection (area 11): The semi-rigidity of lamellar severely limited the amount of movement in the waist. For this reason body armor often stopped here (only covering areas 9-10), and a separate section of armor was worn on the lower abdomen (area 11). European and Asian warriors usually adopted a different type of armor to protect the waist such as a scale or mail skirt, or some sort of leather kilt. *Hauberks* could also be worn (see below). The Japanese developed an apron of large lamellar panels called *kusazuri*.

Upper Leg Protection (areas 12-14; roll 1-3 only): Mounted samurai sometimes wore underneath the *kusazuri* two larger panels called *haidate*, designed to protect the thighs (areas 12-14; roll 1-3 only). The upper section, which was layered under the *kusazuri*, was padded giving +1 DR to area 11. They were extremely awkward to walk in, however, and wearing *haidate* reduces one's Move by -2. The more typical method of protecting the thighs was the *Hauberk* (see below).

Upper Arm protection (areas 6, 8; roll 5-6 only): The nature of lamellar prevented it from being used to create joints. Shoulder and upper arm protection was attached separately, and the underarm was always vulnerable (see *Special Attack -- armpit*, below). Separate lamellar guards could be added to protect the shoulder and upper arm. The Japanese called these *sode* ('sleeve'). Note that lamellar was never worn on the lower arm. Forearm and wrist protection usually took the form of plate or splint armor. The same armor was likewise used for shin greaves.

A device unique to early Japanese samurai was called the *o-sode* ('large sleeve'). A mounted archer could not use a shield so this was developed as a replacement. Each shoulder was protected by a large rectangular panel of rigid lamellar. They were laced to the cuirass and hung down to just above the elbows. O-sode functioned like small shields, sliding off the arms when they were raised to shoot, hanging behind to protect the shoulders and the entire upper back (areas 9-10; rear only). Add +2 PD to any attack striking this area whenever the defender is firing a bow (but it no longer protects the upper arms). The entire weight of o-sode was born by the shoulders making them a little restrictive (-1 to all melee and thrown attacks). However, given that early samurai were mainly mounted bowmen, this wasn't much of a problem.

Description	PD (cut/cr/imp)	DR (cut/cr/imp)	Weight (lbs.)	Cost	Production time
Heavy Scale kilt (area 11)	3/2/2	4/3/3	6	\$80	9 hrs
Kusazuri (area 11)	4/4/3	5/5/4	7	\$210	14 hrs
Haidate (areas 12-14; roll 1-3)	4/4/4	5/5/5	8	\$280	20 hrs
Sode (areas 6, 8; roll 5-6)	4/3/4	5/4/5	6	\$200	12 hrs
O-sode (areas 6, 8; roll 5-6)	4/4/4	5/5/5	8	\$300	20 hrs

Decoration

A neat method of decoration was to alternate steel scales with other metals such as bronze or brass so that a checkerboard effect was produced. Weight and cost is unchanged. This, however, would reduce the defense capability of the armor (-1 DR), so plating was more common. Plating or gilding was used both for decoration and to improve rust resistance. See the [Chainmail](#) article for more on decoration and rustproofing. Gold plate could be gilded onto the scales. White metal plating of scale was frequently either silvered or tinned. The Japanese usually lacquered individual plates in various colors, including gold (gold dust was ground into the lacquer). Plating and lacquering increases cost and manufacture time by 3x (treat as *fine* decoration). If gold is used then the cost is 5x (*very fine* decoration).

Armor and Stealth

Armor is noisy, and easily noticed, making sneaking around difficult. In addition to any encumbrance penalty (see p. B67), armor imposes an *extra* penalty to Stealth, equal to PD-1 (maximum penalty of -3). If different armor types are worn on different body locations, then use the armor with the *highest penalty*. *Special preparation can reduce the chances of being detected by the enemy. Spending 10 mins to pad or tie down rattling buckles and rubbing armor segments can reduce the enemy's Hearing roll by -1.*

Lacquering (see Decoration, above) also reduces the amount of noise made by armor. Another method is to wrap each individual segment in silk cloth or fine leather. Treat as fine decoration and triple the costs accordingly. Both of these methods reduce the enemy's Hearing roll by an additional -1. If appropriate camouflage colours are used (see p. B65) then the enemy also gets a -2 to his Vision roll.

Blackening armor (see [Chainmail](#) article -- Rustproofing) cuts down on glare but does little to reduce noise. If blackened armor covers all the main body locations (head, torso, arms, legs) and is worn at night time or in deep shadow, then reduce the enemy's Vision roll by -2 (in addition to any darkness penalties).

Optional Extras

Special Attack -- armpit: As stated above, lamellar could not be used to effectively cover joints. The armpit was especially vulnerable. A thrusting attack to this area only needs to contend with the lighter layer of protection worn underneath. An impaling wound in the armpit is no laughing matter. It could sever the brachial artery and the nerves controlling the arm, before puncturing the lungs and heart. Treat as a thrusting attack to the vitals but at -6 to hit. If the attack roll is missed by 1 then the torso is hit instead. This attack damages the torso but can also disable the arm. On a critical hit, instead of rolling on the Critical Hit Table, the arm is automatically crippled (see p. B127). This is in addition to any damage done to the torso.

Blunt trauma: Often when a defender wearing non-rigid armor was struck with an impaling or cutting weapon, even though the armor 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 here 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 light lamellar is stabbed with a dagger doing 1d-3 damage. The attacker rolls a 6, which results in 3 points of damage. This is totally absorbed by the armor but, because a 6 was rolled, the defender takes 1 point of crushing damage.

Brigandine (p. LT98): Can only be made from light scale or light lamellar. Brigandine was designed for concealment. Sometimes mistakenly called a coat-of-plates, the name 'brigandine' came from the tendency of robbers and brigands to wear it. **Low-Tech** describes this armor in detail, including rules for Holdout (p. LT98). The best brigandine was made in Milan, Italy. It was the fashion of upper class gentlemen who frequented brothels and other disreputable parts of town, providing good protection from a knife or rapier blade. Brigandine was also worn as a regular part of the fashion of the day. The rows of studs fastening the plates to the fabric were often deliberately left visible on the outside of the garment. Visible studs obviously negate any Holdout bonus.

Hauberks: Flexible armor can be 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. Manufacturing a hauberk adds +50% to the cost, weight, and production time. 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 5-6. A hauberk can be made from medium and heavy lamellar but, like the haidate mentioned above, the wearer suffers a -2 Move penalty because of its awkwardness.

Other Materials

Bronze & Brass: During the Bronze Age (TL1), copper alloys were used extensively in the manufacture of body armor. They are +20% heavier than an equivalent item made from steel. Cost is 80% and manufacture time remains unchanged. Alternatively, if the weight is kept the same as a steel item, the inferior material results in a DR reduction of -1.

Superior steel: Add +1 DR, weight is unchanged. Cost is doubled. This could be equivalent to steels originating from regions like Damascus or Solingen (see p. LT86). Local ores from these areas contained impurities that happened to improve the quality of steel.

(Many thanks to Thomas Barnes, Peter Dell'Orto, Shawn Fisher, and Bob Huss.)

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Unusual Suspects

by Stephen Dedman

This is a collection of 25-point criminally-inclined *GURPS* NPCs designed for use as enemies, allies, dependents, Illuminati dupes, hirelings, or random encounters. They may also owe the PCs a favor, which they can repay in interesting ways . . .

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.

Crystal Carver, Hacker

Attributes: ST 9 [-10], DX 11 [10], IQ 13 [30], HT 9 [-10].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d-1

Basic Speed: 5 Move: 5

Dodge: 5 Parry: n/a Block: n/a

Advantages: Mathematical Ability [10]; Versatile [5].

Disadvantages: Curious [-5]; Manic-Depressive [-20]; Phobia (Open Spaces) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Close Friends).

Quirks: Attentive; Imaginative (during manic phase); Prankster (during manic phase); Nosy; Distrusts multi-national companies.

Skills: Computer Hacking/TL7-16 [8]; Computer Operation/TL7-15 [4]; Computer Programming/TL7-14 [2]; Cryptanalysis/TL7-16 [4]; Cryptography-10 [0]; Cryptology-9 [0]; Electronics/TL7 (Computers)-13 [1]; Electronics Operation/TL7 (Security Systems)-12 [1]; Fast-Talk-12 [1]; Forgery/TL7-13 [2]; Mathematics/TL7-17 [8]; Merchant-12 [1]; Research-13 [2]; Streetwise-11 [1/2].

Gear: Lives in basement apartment with state-of-the-art mainframe computer, security system, and survival equipment. When outside, carries tear gas spray and Swiss army knife, wears leather jacket.

Appearance: 19 years old, but looks barely 15; round-faced, brown skin, curly black hair, brown eyes; 5'5", 135 lbs.

75-point version: Add Eidetic Memory [30] and +1 to IQ (gives +2 to IQ-based skills); replace Manic-Depressive with Trickster.

A mathematical prodigy fond of solving puzzles and cracking codes, Crystal Carver was orphaned a few days after her sixteenth birthday. She and her mother were walking across campus when a sheet of window glass fell from a building site, narrowly missing Crystal and killing her mother. After receiving a compensation payout, Crystal retreated into a basement apartment (a converted fallout shelter), went into business as an internet service provider, and finished her university training by e-mail.

Crystal only ever leaves her apartment during her manic phase, and even then her fear of open spaces won't let her cross the street. What she can't get that way, she orders over the internet and has delivered, or has her friends -- mostly fellow hackers -- bring her. During her manic phase, she also likes to try hacking onto heavily secured websites: she's neither malicious nor particularly greedy, but she's not above using the numbers of corporate credit cards or phone cards to buy what she wants, or diverting the links on conservative websites (she draws the line at viruses, though). She also provides computer support for left-wing protest groups, and enjoys forging false IDs for her underage overachieving friends and "discount vouchers" for multi-national fast food outlets.

Campaign uses: Crystal occasionally hires out as a hacker and codebreaker (using the hacker name Hope Diamond), but only if the cause is good or the challenge sufficiently tempting (McMurdo, for example, might be able to recruit her by using a combination of fast-talk and bribery). Crystal may agree to help the PCs (especially if she owes them a favor), or may become an enemy if she thinks the PCs are a threat to her friends. She's unlikely to be encountered at

random, except in cyberspace -- she rarely goes outside, or lets strangers into her shelter.

Other settings: Crystal can exist in any TL7+ setting; the only changes will be the gadgets with which she surrounds herself (and/or has implanted).

Gene Rogan, Survivalist

Attributes: ST 10 [0], DX 11 [10], IQ 11 [10], HT 10 [0].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d

Basic Speed: 5.25 Move: 5

Dodge: 5 Parry: 7 (Brawling) Block: n/a

Disadvantages: Bloodlust [-10]; Intolerance (other races) [-10]; Overconfidence [-10]; Paranoia [-10].

Quirks: X-files fan; Mild phobia of helicopters; Thinks cats are spying on him; Doesn't eat pork or shellfish; Packrat - hates throwing anything away.

Skills: Armoury/TL7 (Handguns and rifles)-14 [8]; Brawling-11 [1]; Camouflage-9 [0]; Chemistry/TL7-9 [1]; Computer Operations/TL7-10 [1/2]; Conspiracy Theory-8 [1]; Demolitions/TL7-13 [4]; Driving/TL7 (Car)-10 [1]; First-Aid/TL7-10 [1/2]; Forgery/TL7-14 [8]; Guns/TL7 (Rifle)-16 [8], (Shotgun)-14 [0]; (other)-12 [0]; Holdout-9 [1/2]; Intimidation-10 [1]; Knife-11 [1]; Language (English)-11 [0]; Merchant-11 [2]; Orienteering-9 [1/2]; Photography/TL7-10 [1]; Scrounging-12 [2]; Streetwise-10 [1]; Survival (Forest)-11 [2], (Radioactive)-9 [1/2], (other)-8 [0]; Tactics-8 [1/2]; Traps/TL7-11 [2].

Gear: Away from his bunker, Rogan wears a brown leather jacket over a Second Chance Standard vest, jeans, cowboy boots, and an old Stetson over a steel skullcap; his pockets contain at least three double-derringers in different calibers and a small folding knife, while his 4WD van contains at least one rifle, shotgun, and pistol. At home, he wears forest camo over the Kevlar vest, and carries a survival knife and a Beretta 92 modified for burst fire (RoF 18, ST 12, Rcl - 5), with 1d-1 other guns within 4 hexes at any time.

Appearance: 44 years old; Razor-cut rusty brown hair, long moustache, weathered complexion, blue eyes; 5'10", 150 lbs.

75-point version: Add Danger Sense; High Pain Threshold; Resistance to Disease; +1 to IQ and IQ-based skills, +1 to DX and DX-based skills.

Gene Rogan grew up in the suburbs of Denver during the Cold War, with a fallout shelter in his back yard, and most of his childhood fantasies centered around how he would survive and flourish in a post-holocaust environment. After failing the psych tests to enroll in the army, he apprenticed to a gunsmith and later bought his own shop, but soon became convinced that the government was conspiring to put him out of business at any cost. He took to carrying more and more concealed weapons, and came into contact with other conspiracy theorists. When one of these was arrested, the ATF began investigating Rogan, and he was soon imprisoned for several weapons offences.

After his release, the bankrupt Rogan tried unsuccessfully to find another job, and when a former cellmate asked him to make a few silencers, he went into business as an armourer for the black market. He discovered that he also had a knack for forging licenses and ID papers, and after a few years, he had enough money and false references to buy himself some land and start building a small house with a well-equipped underground shelter. Silencers and weapons modified for autofire are his stock-in-trade, but he also makes bombs of all sizes, as well as false documents.

Campaign uses: Rogan is mostly a source of illegal weapons and weak alternate identities (he can fabricate 15-point Alternate Identities in 1d+2 days, but his services won't come cheaply) for the PCs and/or their enemies. In a Supers, Espionage, Cops or Special Ops campaign, he may have built the weapons used in a crime that the PCs are trying to solve, and might need to be taken alive to lead the PCs to the other conspirators. If he becomes convinced that PCs or their dependents are trying to harm him, he may decide to attack them, using bombs and traps or (as a last resort) sniping at them with a high-powered rifle.

Other settings: Though Rogan is designed for a 1980s-1990s setting, he can fit into an *Atomic Horror* setting with almost no changes, and would be perfectly at home (and probably feeling slightly smug) in *Y2K*, *Autoduel*, or *Reign*

of *Steel* campaigns.

Master Sergeant Joe Lord

Attributes: ST 10 [0], DX 10 [0], IQ 12 [20], HT 10 [0].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d

Basic Speed: 5 Move: 3

Dodge: 5 Parry: 6 (Judo) Block: n/a

Advantages: Contact (Street, skill-15, available on a 9 or less, somewhat reliable) [2]; Military Rank/2 (Master Sergeant) [10].

Disadvantages: Duty (on 12 or less, rarely required to risk life) [-5]; Greed [-15]; Migraine (common, appears on 10 or less) [-10]; Overweight [-5, 45 lbs Encumbrance]; Stubbornness [-5].

Quirks: Loves beer and pizza; Considers pistols necessary evils; Dislikes exercise; Incompetence (Cooking); Follows stock market avidly, but never invests.

Skills: Administration-12 [2]; Brawling-10 [1]; Computer Operations/TL7-12 [1]; Detect Lies-12 [4]; Driving/TL7 (Car)-8 [1/2]; Fast-Talk-12 [2]; First-Aid/TL7-11 [1/2]; Guns/TL7 (Light Automatic)-13 [2], (Pistol)-11 [1/2]; Holdout-10 [1/2]; Judo-9 [2]; Knife-10 [1]; Merchant-13 [4]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-11 [1/2]; Scrounging-11 [1/2]; Spear-10 [2]; Stealth-9 [1]; Streetwise-12 [2]; Tactics-12 [4]; Thrown Weapon (Grenade)-10 [1].

Gear: Normally unarmed except for small folding knife. When expecting trouble, Glock-17 in concealed holster and another in car, and wears Second Chance Standard vest under leather jacket. M16 for home defense.

Appearance: 38 years old; Freckled complexion; strawberry blond hair, cut short; blue eyes; 5'10", 195 lbs.

75-point version: Add Ally Group (appears on 6 or less) [5], Danger Sense [15] and Wealth (Comfortable) [10]; add +1 to, DX and DX-based skills; remove Migraines.

Joe Lord grew up in a rough neighborhood in New Jersey, the youngest of three sons. After one of his brothers died while stealing a car, and his father and oldest brother were arrested for planning an armed robbery, Joe's mother persuaded him to enlist in the Marines in the hope of keeping him out of trouble. To her surprise, and his, Joe found that military discipline suited him well, and he rose through the ranks to become a supply sergeant. Unfortunately, Joe's greed got the better of him after he realized that his superiors rarely bothered checking the inventory to see what was missing. While reluctant to sell too much military equipment, because of the dangers of eventually being caught, he found he could supplement his income by hiring some of it out to criminals. Soon Joe's relatives and their friends were hijacking trucks and robbing banks while armed with military weapons and wearing government-issue body armor.

Joe, who has grown plump from years behind a desk, prefers to avoid the violent end of either military or criminal operations, but he is able to protect himself if necessary.

Campaign uses: Joe is mostly a source of military equipment for the PCs and/or their enemies. He sells weapons, ammunition, etc., at normal black-market prices and in limited quantities, but treats this payment as a deposit against 10% of the take from a robbery, and "buys back" the items after the job is over (effectively charging 10% of the black market price per day for hire, paying a minimum of 30% for items returned after a week). While he rarely smuggles more out of the store in one day than he can carry in the trunk of his old Cadillac, he can easily provide a small team of PCs with weapons, armor, SCUBA gear, etc. He can't provide them with vehicles, but he can supply uniforms and help smuggle them onto a base where they can attempt to steal whatever they need.

Other settings: Quartermasters who sell their government's equipment may be found in any era or nation. Replace Computer Operations with Forgery to put Joe into a pre-1970s setting, and change other TL7 skills and equipment as necessary.

Raji Sahir, Gambler

Attributes: ST 9 [-10], DX 9 [-10], IQ 12 [20], HT 9 [-10].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d-1

Basic Speed: 4 Move: 4

Dodge: 5 Parry: 5 Block: n/a

Advantages: Danger Sense [15]; Language Talent +1 [2]; Night Vision [10]. Psionics: Clairvoyance (9)-12; Limitations, Roll to Activate (Activation number 11). Range 6' 9". [10]

Disadvantages: Combat Paralysis [-15]; Low Pain Threshold [-10]; Overconfidence [-10]; Skinny [-5].

Quirks: Collects comics; Dreams of being a superhero sidekick; Incompetence (Motorcycle); Loves very spicy food; Mild weakness for redheads.

Skills: Archaeology-12 [4]; Artist-9 [1/2]; Cooking-11 [1/2]; Criminology/TL7-10 [1/2]; Driving (Car)-8 [1]; Fast-Talk-10 [1/2]; First Aid/TL7-11 [1/2]; Forensics/TL7-9 [1/2]; Gambling-13 [4]; History-10 [1]; Judo-8 [2]; Languages (Arabic)-12 [1/2], (English)-13 [1], (French)-12 [1/2], (Hindi)-14 [0], (Latin)-12 [1/2], (Mandarin)-12 [1/2], (Russian)-12 [1/2], (Spanish)-12 [1/2]; Linguistics-10 [1]; Lockpicking/TL7-10 [1/2]; Research-12; Scrounging-11 [1/2].

Gear: Usually wears leather jacket, jeans, sneakers, and mirrorshades. As Schrodinger, add leather hood (DR 1), Second Chance Standard vest, leather gloves, smoke grenade, lockpicks, and handcuffs.

Appearance: 22 years old; dark brown skin, straight black hair, dark brown eyes; 5'9", 100 lbs.

75-point version: Add +1 to IQ and IQ-based skills, +2 to, DX and DX-based skills, Fit, and Luck [15]; replace Combat Paralysis with Pacifism (Cannot Kill or Self-Defense Only).

Raji Sahir had long had a knack for "guessing" what was inside parcels, "seeing" other people's cards, and "divining" where things were hidden or buried, but it wasn't until he volunteered for an ESP experiment at his college that he realized that he had an unreliable clairvoyance talent. While this made him more useful when he went on digs with other archaeology students (compensating for his natural clumsiness), and enabled him to supplement his income by playing poker and blackjack, his real dream is to use his powers to become a spy or fight crime.

Campaign uses: In a Supers campaign, Sahir will moonlight as the minor-league crimefighter Schrodinger, hoping that an experienced superhero (e.g. one of the PCs) will take him on as a sidekick. Alternatively, the GM may choose to make him a criminal, but he can probably wreak more havoc as a wannabe hero. For one thing, he's very good at seeing inside helmets and behind masks . . .

In "real world" campaigns, abilities such as Sahir's are rare enough to be very useful; he may be able to tell spies, cops or conspiracy theorists what lies inside closed buildings, safes, suspicious looking parcels, flesh holsters, etc. The PCs may be able to enlist his services -- but so may their enemies.

Other settings: Sahir's abilities are ideal for counter-espionage or treasure-hunting in any setting past or future, enabling him to foil the PCs' plans or those of their enemies at any time. He could help protect a daimyo from ninja, or detect armed cyborgs in a spaceport bar; hunt for booze with Prohibition-era gangbusters or narcotics with the DEA; single-handedly save the city of Troy; etc. He could also make a living as a gambler at any time since the invention of playing cards.

Senator Richard McMurdo

Attributes: ST 9 [-10], DX 10 [0], IQ 12 [20], HT 9 [-10].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d-1

Basic Speed: 4.75 Move: 4

Dodge: 4 Parry: 5 (Boxing) Block: n/a

Advantages: Contact (Business, skill-18, available on a 9 or less, somewhat reliable) [3]; Contact (Military, skill-21, available on a 6 or less, somewhat reliable) [2]; Contact (Police, skill-15, available on a 9 or less, somewhat reliable) [2]; Contact (Street, skill-15, available on a 9 or less, Unreliable) [1]; Favor (Medium sized Ally Group, appears on 6 or less) [2]; Favor (Political Party; Patron, very powerful organization, appears on 9 or less) [5]; Reputation (+2 to

political allies, large group of people, recognized on 10 or less) [3]; Status +2 [5; 1 level free with Wealth]; Voice [10]; Wealthy [20].

Disadvantages: Alcoholism [-15]; Dependent (wife, 51-75 point character) [0]; Greed [-15]; Post-Combat Shakes [-5]; Reputation (-2 to political opponents, large group of people, recognized on 10 or less) [-3]; Unfit [-5].

Skills: Administration-12 [2]; Area Knowledge (Constituency)-13 [2]; Area Knowledge (World)-12 [1]; Bard-12 [1/2]; Boxing-8 [1/2]; Conspiracy Theory-7 [1/2]; Detect Lies-11 [2]; Diplomacy-13 [2]; Economics/TL7-9 [1/2]; Fast-Talk-12 [2]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-11 [1/2], (Rifle)-12 [1]; Law-10 [1]; Politics-15 [4]; Savoir-Faire-16 [0]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-14 [0]; Streetwise-10 [1/2].

Quirks: Incompetence (Mechanic); Always buys American-made gear if possible; Loves Westerns and war movies; Talkative when drunk; Dislikes children.

Gear: Good suit; Second Chance Standard Vest; mobile phone; large amount of cash; shoes or cowboy boots. Keeps a few guns in his home and office, but rarely carries a weapon.

Appearance: 49 years old; tanned complexion; wavy iron-grey hair; brown eyes; 5'10", 150 lbs.

75-point version: Add +1 to IQ and IQ-based skills; add Light Hangovers advantage; change Favors to Ally Group and Patron; change Wealth level to Very Wealthy.

Richard McMurdo had greatness thrust upon him at the age of twenty-three, when his father, a successful lawyer and businessman turned politician, suffered a minor heart attack while on the campaign trail. When doctors told McMurdo Senior that he was unlikely to survive another election, he began grooming his son to replace him. Thanks to his father's influence and investments, Richard rose through the ranks of the party, and became his small state's junior senator a few weeks after his thirty-fifth birthday. McMurdo Senior died the next year, leaving his son to cope as best he could.

McMurdo's tactic for gaining power is to single out a group with little political power and publicly attack them: depending on the campaign and setting, this may be a government body (such as NASA, the CIA, or a city police department), a private company or club (TSF, Supertemps, the AADA), or a type of person (science fiction fans, hackers, bounty hunters, martial artists, magicians, etc.). Occasionally he will single out an individual as a target -- an administrator, a scientist, a superhero, a publisher of girlie magazines or RPGs -- and become that person's Enemy.

While neither charismatic nor academically gifted, McMurdo has a knack for guessing who can be bought, and with what currency, and for how long they'll stay bought. Fortunately for him, he can afford to keep giving the voters, his allies in the party, and the special interests who pay for his campaigns, what they want. People he can't buy make him nervous, and he will do his best to destroy any who cross him -- though usually he prefers to ruin their reputations and/or livelihood, and will only have them physically attacked as a last resort.

Campaign uses: A PC who has McMurdo as an enemy should expect lots of low-level harassment -- smear campaigns in the senate and the press, problems caused by unusually diligent police and inefficient bureaucracies (license checks, lost paperwork), etc. This may escalate to them having their bank accounts frozen, being temporarily declared dead, being framed for crimes, etc. If the PCs try fighting back, McMurdo will hire a bodyguard and ask his police contacts to beef up surveillance on the group. While he can afford to hire professional criminals for really dirty work -- burglary, hacking, assault or assassination -- he prefers to rely on corrupt cops and spies.

If McMurdo is an ally of the PCs or owes them a favor, he can lend them money or try to arrange government funding (research grants, etc.), halt a police investigation, have their enemies arrested, or put them in touch with the expert they need for a particular job. He may even be able to arrange temporary legal enforcement powers (by having them deputised or hired as "consultants"), legal alternate identities, diplomatic immunity, etc. -- but PCs will have to pay for favors like these with character points.

Other settings: McMurdo is designed for a modern-day Supers or Illuminati campaign, but might be found in any setting where political power can be bought and/or inherited. Only his equipment need be changed: he will always wear the best concealable armor available for the era, but will only carry weapons when it is socially acceptable. In low-tech settings, he will need a larger staff (secretaries and messengers as well as bodyguards); at higher tech levels, these may be replaced by computers, expensive security systems, and robots.

Yoshi and O-kazu, Assassins

Attributes: ST 10 [0], DX 13 [30], IQ 10 [0], HT 11 [0].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d

Basic Speed: 6 Move: 6

Dodge: 6 Parry: 6 (Judo) Block: n/a

Advantages: Attractive; Musical Ability +2; Voice.

Disadvantages: Dependent (other twin; loved one, appears on 15 or less) [-48]; Secret (ninja) [-10].

Yoshi

Skills: Acrobatics-10 [1/2]; Acting-10 [2]; Bard-10 [1/2]; Blowpipe-10 [2]; Disguise-9 [1]; Escape-10 [1/2]; Garrote-14 [2]; Judo-10 [1/2]; Karate-10 [1/2]; Knife-14 [2]; Musical Instrument (Flute)-10 [1]; Pickpocket-12 [2]; Poisons-8 [1]; Running-8 [1/2]; Savoir-Faire-11 [1/2]; Sex-Appeal-13 [1]; Scrounging-10 [1]; Singing-14 [1/2]; Stealth-13 [2].

Quirks: Bisexual; Overconfidence, only when drunk; Collects dirty jokes; Mild jealousy; Enjoys lying to the gullible.

Gear: Rope garrote; Tanto (large knife); Blowpipe (disguised as flute); 4 bamboo slivers dipped in fugu poison; 4 doses masuizaki powder; padded cotton kimono (DR 1); medium pouch; traveler's straw hat; sandals.

Appearance: 20 years old; light golden complexion; black hair; brown eyes; 5'4", 120 lbs.

O-kazu

Skills: Acrobatics-10 [1/2]; Acting-10 [2]; Bard-10 [1/2]; Cooking-9 [1/2]; Dancing-11 [1/2]; Disguise-10 [2]; Escape-10 [1/2]; Garrote-12 [1/2]; Judo-10 [1/2]; Karate-10 [1/2]; Knife-13 [1]; Musical Instrument (Biwa)-10 [1]; Pickpocket-12 [2]; Poisons-9 [2]; Running-8 [1/2]; Savoir-Faire-12 [1]; Scrounging-9 [1/2]; Sex-Appeal-13 [2]; Singing-15 [1]; Stealth-13 [2].

Quirks: Bisexual; No alcohol or drugs (but does a great lecherous drunk act); Mild laziness; Dislikes dogs; Loves new costumes.

Gear: Kozuka (small knife), disguised as hair ornament; Combat fan; 4 doses fugu poison; 4 doses masuizaki powder; 4 doses lacquer; Silk kimono; traveler's straw hat; umbrella; fan; sandals.

Appearance: 20 years old; light golden complexion; black hair; brown eyes; 5'3", 110 lbs.

75-point version: Add Combat Reflexes [15] and High Pain Threshold [10]; add +1 to IQ and IQ-based skills; add Bloodlust; raise Judo and Karate skills to 11 [1/2 point each] and add Arm Lock-12 [1/2] and Knee Strike-11 [1/2] maneuvers. Value of Dependent disadvantage reduced to 0.

In 1571, entire ninja clans were wiped out in the battle of Mt Hiei. Yoshi and O-kazu were only babies at the time, but would also have been slaughtered had their mother O-yuri not escaped with them before the battle began. Too paranoid and impulsive to stay in one place for long, O-yuri took the twins with her as she travelled through Japan -- cutting purses in Izumo, working in a brothel in Edo and a slaughterhouse in Osaka, and wandering with a troupe of entertainers before settling down in an inn on the Tokaido Road. She taught the twins to hate samurai, and what ninja skills she could, until she died the day after their thirteenth birthday.

The twins soon found themselves another teacher and protector, a wealthy and unscrupulous merchant named Takeshi. When O-kazu heard her employer wish the local daimyo dead, she volunteered to kill him. He became the first of the twins' many victims. Takeshi himself was poisoned a few years later by his wife and her lover, who tried to blame O-kazu; the twins fled, leaving Takeshi's wife hanging from the rafters surrounded by poems her lover had written her.

Yoshi and O-kazu became wandering entertainers, hiring out as prostitutes or assassins as required. Occasionally one will murder a client if they think they've been underpaid, or a samurai who boasts of being at Mt Hiei, but mostly they're careful not to draw suspicion on themselves. Yoshi likes to garrote his victims, while O-kazu prefers poisoning their food or drinks, but though they usually carry knives and other concealable weapons, both will run or hide rather than fight.

Campaign uses: Able separately or jointly to appeal to most sexual preferences, Yoshi and O-kazu pose a danger to anyone with the Lecherousness disadvantage, and murder most of their victims in bed (though when short on money, they may settle for luring people into dark alleys). Either may be hired to kill a PC, or hired by the PCs to kill an enemy, and anyone harming one of the pair will almost certainly be killed by the other. The twins will occasionally join larger groups of criminals, though rarely for long.

Other settings: Yoshi and O-kazu are best suited to settings where handguns and swords are rare, but with different names and gear, they might appear as wandering bards in a fantasy campaign, as an act in a Roaring 20s speakeasy, or as the pets of a minor crime boss in any era.

Adventure Seeds

Who Was that Masked Man? (for Cliffhangers or Modern Day)

The PCs need to find who has supplied a branch of the Ku Klux Klan with automatic weapons used in a murder. Raji Sahir is able to see the faces inside the hoods, if he can get close enough, but taking him to a Klan meeting (even in disguise) is hazardous.

Hacker Crackdown (for Modern Day or Cyberpunk)

After his website is sabotaged to show a spreadsheet listing donations to his campaign, Senator McMurdo starts making life tough for hackers in general, and tells his criminal contacts to spread the word that he's offering a reward to shut down "Hope Diamond." The PCs may be trying to protect Crystal, or bounty-hunters competing with other thugs for the reward.

Creatures of the Night -- and Afternoon, Evening, or Too Darn Early in the Morning

aka "IOU Bestiary Out-Takes"

by Elizabeth McCoy and Walter Milliken

When composing the Illuminati University "bestiary," space forced us to leave several things out of the final version. One of the most notable lacuna was left by the *Anims*, our attempt to allow *Toon/GURPS* crossovers. (Other nascent plans included actual conversion guidelines for *Toon* characters into *GURPS*. That was clearly meant to rest on some other intrepid author's shoulders.)

Anims

ST: 1-12 **Move/Dodge:** var. **Size:** any
DX: 1-12 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** any
IQ: 1-12 **Damage:** embarrass **Origin:** Weird Science
HT: 1-12/# **Reach:** C **Habitats:** Anywhere They're Not Wanted

Note: Anim attributes *never* exceed 12, except that multi-hex Anims have roughly 10 hit points per hex of size.

Advantages: Instant Regeneration, Indestructible (see below).

Disadvantages: at least one Odious Personal Habit (often Practical Joker); most also have the Compulsive Behavior: Be Silly.

Skills: varied, but no Anim ever has a skill level above 12, even with modifiers.

Short for "Animates," anims are sentient creatures made of doesn't-matter (see p. IOU82) by an especially unsuccessful WUSE experiment. These cartoon-like creatures sometimes spontaneously appear on campus, harassing students, staff, and faculty. A few have been admitted as students, or employed as staff or even faculty. Most vaguely resemble normal people, animals, plants, or inanimate objects. All are self-aware (though many are incredibly stupid) and capable of speech, though holding a conversation with one is usually a frustrating experience.

All anims have the advantage Instant Regeneration (see p. CI64), regaining one point of HT every second. They also have the special advantage "Indestructible" -- like demons, destruction of an anim's physical body merely relegates it to some Limbo, and it will eventually return, usually at the most inconvenient time.

Despite the rapid -- and enthusiastic -- destruction of the original anim generator (which was *supposed* to be the ultimate kitchen appliance), new anims appear on campus from time to time. Theories on this phenomenon are varied: some hold that the original anim generator merely opened a gate to an especially strange demonic plane that the other demons sealed away as too dangerous, and mercifully forgot.

Other professors, led by Professor Cootie of the English Department, advocate the "Cootie Theory" -- that like vampires and werewolves, the anim "life force" is contagious, and prolonged contact between anims and normal matter causes otherwise normal animals and objects to become animates themselves. Campus Security favors this theory, as it justifies their efforts to purge the campus of anims (since it *is* theoretically possible to get rid of them, unlike in the "demonic gate" explanation). More importantly, the inevitable massive collateral damage becomes "purification of contaminated objects."

The Team has developed a simpler theory -- that anims are created by art students ("they're all wimps, anyway"), which leads to frequent lynchings in front of the Fine Arts building. Fortunately for the victimized artists, the Team

has yet to figure out how to tie reliable knots.

Variations: Anims will not exist except on a Silly campus. Honest.

Cash Cows

ST: 40-70 **Move/Dodge:** 8/4 **Size:** 3
DX: 8-9 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 1/2-1 ton
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 1d+1 **Origin:** Weird Science
HT: 14-17 **Reach:** C **Habitats:** Plains, Campus Grounds

A project in the Department of Animal Spousery, calves are born a metallic gold color, which turns to green and black as they get older. When fed *precisely* the right diet, they will produce milk with a high concentration of gold flakes (worth at least as much as the special diet, and often a little more). Unfortunately, getting the diet right can be a bit tricky. Mostly, the Department of Animal Spousery just sells them to greedy farmers or ranchers for high prices.

Cash cows will only produce more cash cows when bred to a cash bull (these keep their golden color, and are often referred to, jokingly, as "papal" bulls); bred to a normal animal, their offspring is normal. They produce a respectable quantity of normal milk when not on their special diet, and are fairly typical dairy cows, except for the color.

The bulls are also typical in personality, though slightly smaller than their normal counterparts. Short-tempered, they are likely to react to trespassing students with a charge -- a slam and a trample. The slam (*head butt*) does a base damage of 1d crushing (1d+1 impaling if the bull's horns are long). After knocking the foe down, the bull tramples with its hooves for 1d+1 crushing, halved for running through the hex. It will then turn around and gore the prone victim (or chase a running one), this time doing only half head butt damage because the speed of the charge is missing. If there is anything left, the bull will toss the remains: treat this as falling damage from 5 yards (p. B130).

Variations: In a Weird or Dark setting, cash cows have more normal coloration (though still with hints of oddness), but are otherwise unchanged. Well, the genetic engineer(s) responsible for Dark cash cows may have signed some contracts in blood, but that surely wouldn't affect the cows, right?

Cat-alog

ST: 10+ **Move/Dodge:** 15/7 **Size:** <1 hex-1 hex
DX: 14+ **PD/DR:** 2/4 **Weight:** 15-50 lbs.
IQ: 10+ **Damage:** 3d cut **Origin:** Weird Science
HT: 15+ **Reach:** C **Habitats:** Campus Grounds

Skills: Fast-Talk-15, Merchant-15.

These felinoid sales-creatures are easily distinguished from the ArchDean's cats by their extensive cybernetic enhancements -- think "RoboCat." However, they use their formidable cyborging for one purpose only: to sell things.

Every Cat-alog carries a means of displaying its items (a slide- or holo-projector are most common), and the larger ones will have sample merchandise tucked away in special compartments inside their chromed bodies -- students are advised against attempts to steal samples, since Cat-alog *are* cyborged. They are all capable of reading credit cards by licking the mag-stripe, or they deal in cash by swallowing money and spitting out the change.

The Cat-alog's most innocuous tactic is to position themselves near a group of students -- outside the cafeteria, next to the Adds & Drops building, in front of dorm doors, et cetera -- and start into their selling spiel, repeating as necessary until they've sold something, been driven away, or just decided that nobody around has enough money to buy what they're offering. (Cat-alog *will* make deals, lowering their prices from incredibly over-priced to merely exorbitant.) However, as if their incessant sales pitches weren't enough, they may also corner individual students and, after using

their cybernetic enhancements to good effect, recite their commercials to a literally captive audience.

Variations: Cat-logs are unlikely to appear on any campus but Silly, though a Cyberpunk campaign might have some. A Dark Cyberpunk setting would probably build *human* brains into the animal-esque robot bodies.

Dogs, Stray

ST: 1-12# **Move/Dodge:** 4-12/6# **Size:** 1 hex
DX: 11-12 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 5-150+ lbs.
IQ: 5 **Damage:** * **Origin:** Real
HT: 12-15/4-12 **Reach:** C **Habitats:** Campus Grounds, Real World

Occasionally, stray dogs from the town will wander onto campus -- some of these are pampered pets who have slipped away for a moment (or at least until a reward is offered for their return), some are perpetual strays who stop off at a particular house for a daily handout and some few are feral canines who are attracted by the various fauna -- squirrels, pigeons, rabbits, meeps, and for the desperately hungry, arctic furred turtles.

For the most part, stray dogs are ignored until they get into enough mischief (digging in the gardens, tearing up trashbags, or leaving "doggy deposits" outside the School for Social Anti-Sciences) that somebody will catch the offending beast and call the local pound. However, those canines who try chasing the ArchDean's cats will soon discover what the phrase "Evolution in Action" means as they are abruptly yanked out of the gene pool. Mostly, such foolish dogs just . . . disappear. Rumors of flashes of lightning are surely exaggerated.

Therefore, most strays on campus will be very well-behaved, and restrict themselves to lurching on meeps or begging for handouts from students.

ST, HT, Weight and Move vary greatly, depending on breed. A small lap dog has Move 4, while some greyhounds reach Move 20, with selected individuals hitting Mach speeds and low orbit . . .

Taxi Drivers

ST: 9-14 **Move/Dodge:** 6/6 **Size:** 1 hex
DX: 14-18 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 160-220 lbs.
IQ: 8-10 **Damage:** by car **Origin:** Real
HT: 10-13 **Reach:** C **Habitats:** Roads, Real World

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Absolute Timing.

Disadvantages: Greedy, Illiterate, Bad Temper, On The Edge.

Skills: Area Knowledge-20, Driving-20, English-7.

The ultimate in "wandering monsters," taxi drivers are commonly found on streets (and sidewalks), usually in a cab moving at about 50 mph through a traffic light that just turned red. Naturally, the PCs are trying to cross the street at the same time . . .

Sometimes taxi drivers can be useful for transportation, or to find a particular place or type of place. ("Sure-I-know-just-de-spot-ver-e-ya-kin-find-a-pizza-wid-pickled-newts. Ten dolla.") Just remember, "Taxi drivers don't speak English, and they don't take Illuminati Express cards."

Waterbed Elementals

ST: 9-15 **Move/Dodge:** 4/4 **Size:** 1 hex
DX: 10-12 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 120-160 lbs.
IQ: 8-12 **Damage:** thrust/cr. **Origin:** Weird Magic

HT: 12-20 **Reach:** C

Habitats: Dorms

Presumably these creatures were once free undines (see p. M114), but were captured and bound into waterbeds by sybaritic Metaphysics majors. Or perhaps they are the result of a Body of Water spell gone wrong (or right . . .) and a Bimbira.

However they were created, it *is* certain that waterbed elementals appear as curvaceous humanoid females, and they give the *best* backrubs that bribery can acquire. Their curiously mattress-less homes are standard furnishings in the most luxurious dorm rooms, but it is harder to acquire one for an off-campus dwelling -- possibly they can't survive in low mana areas.

Male versions of waterbed elementals are not yet known, though elementals really are neuters, and ought to be able to take whatever form they wish.

Variations: On a Weird campus, a waterbed elemental will only manifest as a peculiarly sapient waterbed, responsive to commands such as "massage" or "rocking boat mode." In a Dark one, they're probably not actually elementals, but instead are *demons* . . .

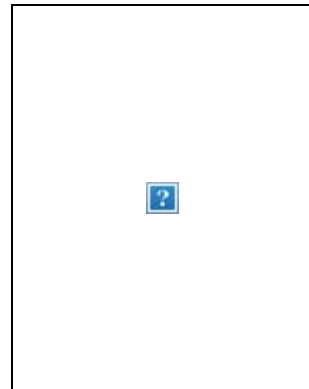
Pyramid Review

The Book of Eldritch Might (for d20)

Published by [Sword & Sorcery Studios](#)

Written by Monte Cook

48 b&w pages; \$10.95



The Book of Eldritch Might is full of crunchy stuff that can easily be added to most campaigns with a minimum amount of set up time. There are new feats, prestige classes, spells, magic items, and a new template.

Among the new feats, a new type of feat is introduced, the Eldritch Feat. These feats grant magical abilities or mystical powers. Despite the potential for abuse, they have high requirements so low level games shouldn't suffer, and by the time the character can use them, the abilities of the feats, while powerful, aren't unbalancing at that point. For example, Conjure Mastery grants all creatures summoned a +2 bonus to Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity, while Lace Spell has three sub feats like Elemental Energies, Enemy Bane, and Holy/Unholy. Each one adds an extra amount of damage with a special kick to it. Enemy Bane inflicts +20% damage against that type of creature.

For those more interested in general feats, the manufacture magic poison feat allows the user to invent poisons, a great feat for any assassin with a very high requirement of spellcaster level 1+ and Cha 19+. Other feats include Dreamspeaking, a useful tool for roleplaying out dreams and dream scenes, and magic talent, which gives +2 bonus to Knowledge (arcane) and Spellcraft. At this point, I think it's time that the official feat Skill Focus either go up to +3 for a single skill, or just change the wording so that it's a +2 bonus to any two related skills.

There are three new prestige classes: the embermage (a fire wizard to the Nth degree), the graven one (a tattoo covered spellcaster), and the mirror master (an arcane spell user whose mastery over mirror magic gives him access to new abilities). The focus of each class prohibits them from getting spells every level, so their spells per day are only increased every other level. The Embermage gains special abilities related to fire, such as Burning Touch, which flames burst forth from the tips of his fingers, to Internal Explosion, an ability that allows the Embermage to cast the spell Implosion on another with the special effect of fire. The Graven One gains different tattoos with different abilities. These tattoos have variable times to scribe and duration, but each gives the user different bonuses. For example, some of the basic ones, like Endurance, Strength, or Dexterity, give the user a special bonus to that stat, while Fortification has a 25% chance to negate critical hits. Each has several new spells and abilities that are all covered in this book. Mirror Masters gain special abilities with a focus towards . . . yes, mirrors. Some of their early abilities include Mirror Thoughts, where the spellcaster uses a mirror to read other people's thoughts, and Mirrored Eyes, an ability that gives the arcane spell user another saving throw against gaze attacks. There is a nice selection of Mirror Master bonus spells, including several that are introduced in this book.

Chapter Three covers spells, and that's where the bulk of the book resides. Starting the chapter off is a listing by class of all the spells. The spell list is nice because it includes in it a breakdown for assassins, bards, clerics, druids, sorcerers, and wizards. Usually the non-arcane spell users, especial the prestige class assassin, get left off such lists. While there are a lot of spells meant to do damage and knock out the enemy as quickly as possible, they do things a little different here. Some of them combine different types of damage, so some damage might come from sound, another part from fire. These types of spells are great to shake up things. How can you go wrong with spells like Coldscream, -- half cold, half sonic -- or Acidic Curse which fills a victims eyes with acid? The majority of the spells here of course, fall within Evocation, with a smattering of Transmutation, Necromantic, and Universal.

The new magic items include all categories: weapons, rings, rods, wondrous items, magical vehicles, poisons, and

minor and major artifacts. Some of my favorite items from this section include the magical vehicles. While the Bulette Walker isn't anything great, being a magical vehicle hollowed out former living bulette, the War Throne and War Altar are both impressive pieces. These could finally give a GM a chance to use some of his *Games Workshop* pawns that never quite fit into the setting before. The major artifacts weren't anything special or innovative, being a powerful Staff of Eldritch Might, and Tears of the Gods. Both powerful but not without equal or superior items in other books.

The magical poisons add a nice touch to the mix. Included are almost twenty different magical poisons that range from darkmind, which puts the victim into a coma, to fireheart, which burns the victim with fire damage. One of no-brainer sections includes a new listing of potions that follows the formula from the DMG of spells being potions.

One of the nice things about this book is that the requirements to craft the items is listed. I hate it when a cool general magic item is introduced without the requirements to make it. Want to know how to make a Rod of Branding? You have to be 14th level with Craft Rod with the following spells, silence, and limited wish with a market price of 55,000 gold pieces. Of course the major artifacts don't have such a listing as these are items without peer and can't be recreated.

Chapter five covers magical constructs. This template can be added to many types of creatures and includes two examples, a stone (dire) tiger, and an eleven headed brass hydra.

Appendix I is a random rune description tables. Three tables that allow a GM to quickly come up with different runes. For example, a roll of 54, 60, and 18 provides a spear thrust through a tree inscribed within a red circle. A neat tool for the time pressed. Appendix II is the good old Open Game Content and License, and the book ends with an ad for the printed version of the *Demon God's Fane*.

The book follows the standard two columns of text per page with black and white illustrations breaking up the text. The interior covers aren't used, which is too bad since the open game content and ad could've been placed there and some more spells then been added.

Since this supplement was originally offered as a \$5.00 36-page downloadable PDF, what are the differences between this and the PDF version outside of the price? The PDF version had no spell lists in its original incarnation, but since it was created for the printed version, that's now available. In addition, the PDF version boasted full color art, but not as much as the paper version; in general, the paper version has art that is cleaner and easier on the eyes. The PDF version was also missing some minor parts, like the potions and some of the general feats, but the latter were available for free download prior so that's not a big deal. In other words, if you have the PDF version, you aren't missing too much.

For those who don't have the PDF version and are looking for more spells, prestige classes, and magic items, *The Book of Eldritch Might* is a no-brainer for purchase. Many of the items, like the magic poisons, aren't covered in other products, and the feats can add another layer of power to spellcasters who are already jaded with the vast amount of material out there.

For those wishing to see a sample of the product, check http://www.montecook.com/arch_stuff4.html , a preview of the monster template, for more info.

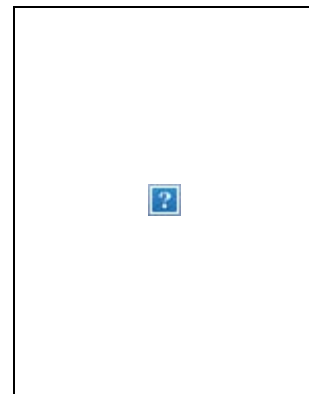
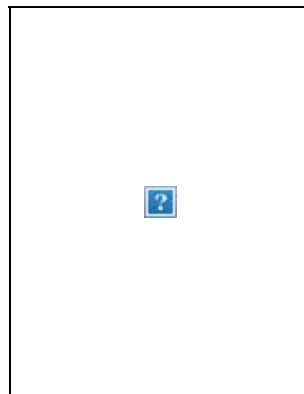
--Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Review

Dime Heroes RPG and Jungle Adventures Supplement

Published by [Deep7](#)

Written by James Stubbs



Dime Heroes: 11 pages (2.59 MB pdf file); \$3.95

Jungle Adventures: 15 pages (2.79 MB pdf file); \$1.00 when bought with Dime Heroes

Pulp-era gaming is becoming popular again, as more companies release or re-release pulp games. *Dime Heroes* is the newest 1PG RPG from Deep7, and *Jungle Adventures* is the first *Dime Heroes* supplement. Both are e-book releases only. You will need Internet access to download them, and an unzipping program and Adobe Acrobat Reader to use.

Dime Heroes is inspired by pulp stories, radio dramas and movie serials. The main influence in the game appears to be movie serials. It assumes the players and GM are already familiar with role-playing games and the pulps. A GM willing to provide explanations or references could use it to introduce new players to role playing, or his current group to the pulp era.

Character generation in *Dime Heroes* is mostly done with random roll, with skill points distributed by the player, and could be completed in a few minutes. The system uses four attributes (Moxie, Glitz, Cunning, and Gray Matter), rated from 1 to 3, each of which has at least four skills associated with it. To use a skill, add the skill rating to the appropriate attribute, and then try to roll that number or lower on one d6. There are also four other character statistics; Blood, Guts, Wits, and Notoriety. Blood is the amount of damage a character can take, the other three are for special situations.

[SPOILER ALERT]

Dime Heroes comes with a 5-episode adventure entitled, "The Crimson Tiger Strikes!" The adventure is undated, though between the atomic ray that is the MacGuffin and the use of TV cameras to watch the entrance to the Crimson Tiger's lair I would judge the game year to be in the mid to late 1940's. The basic outline of "find the criminal mastermind" would be typical of most of the pulp era. The GM will need to camouflage the railroad tracks in this adventure unless he has very tolerant players. Phrases such as "regardless of the players' actions . . ." are not a good sign.

Proofreading is generally good. The Crimson Tiger's ransom demand drops from 100 million dollars to 1 million dollars in the course of the adventure, and there are a few minor typos that made it through as well, but nothing that should make it hard to understand the rules.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

There are some gaps in the rule system. *Dime Heroes* needs a non-lethal form of combat; currently anything from a fist to a fragmentation grenade subtracts from the victim's Blood, and a character who loses all his Blood is dying. Two of the adventure episodes depend on the heroes taking a prisoner alive and intact enough to rat out his boss, and it would be nice to be able to do that without getting into house rules. Related to this, there are no rules on healing damage in the game. If you're copying the serials, this wouldn't matter -- any heroes not dead at the end of the last episode will be fully recovered shortly into the current episode. If you want to run a game that's more like the pulp

magazines, well, the Shadow needed medical attention during the story on several occasions. The guidelines for using Notoriety are alluded to in the Rules of Play section but not present. The character sheet includes a hit location grid and space for vehicle statistics, but neither is covered in the rules. Guts and Wits need a better description; as it is Wits appear to be *Call of Cthulhu* SAN points that can only be recovered by spending character experience. However, since Wits don't come into play in either of the adventures currently published for *Dime Heroes*, this is a minor point.

Jungle Adventures is meant to expand Dime Heroes into the realm of lost civilizations and Tarzan-esque adventure. The core rules are not included. It provides a new character type (Jungle Lord/Lady), suggestions on modifying the Explorer and Hunter types from *Dime Heroes* to fit better in a Jungle Adventures game, and notes on developing new character types. There is a four-page section on jungle adventuring, from the different types of tribes one can encounter to surviving after the party's bearers run away in fear with the supplies.

[SPOILER ALERT]

Jungle Adventures also comes with a 5-episode adventure, "The Blood God." As with "The Crimson Tiger Strikes!" there is no game year given. Also as with the earlier adventure, it locks players into a given course of action, though this one may be more heavily railroaded than the first. I know several players who would object strongly to the entire party contracting malaria by GM fiat, even if the biologically impossible method from the adventure was replaced with something that could actually work. Player character caution could eliminate the malaria and two other events that the adventure depends on, but the adventure doesn't allow for that. While the "poetic justice" ending written into the adventure is appropriate to the genre, allowing the PCs to eliminate the villain themselves is also appropriate, not a sign that "these people need therapy." (Especially since the author had no trouble with the PCs blowing away all the villain's followers . . .) As a final note, players who know anything about the ancient Maya may need to be reminded that historical accuracy was never a strong point of the pulps.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Should you buy *Dime Heroes*? If you know nothing about pulp gaming, you would be better off buying a game that includes background information on the pulps and the pulp era. If you want something you can download and run as-is, it will depend on your gaming group. I wouldn't run either adventure without rewriting, but your players may vary. On the other hand, if you want something quick and easy for an impromptu gaming session, *Dime Heroes* certainly qualifies. Ease of play (and the basic game rules printed on the character sheet) would also make this a good game for a convention or game store demo. As long as you're downloading *Dime Heroes*, the extra dollar for *Jungle Adventures* is probably worth it. The adventuring section will never replace my copy of *Lands of Mystery*, but makes some good points. The page on designing your own character types would be useful in any pulp genre.

--Leah Watts

Wanna Bête? The Beast of Gévaudan

"For I was now upon the limit of Velay, and all that I beheld lay in another county -- wild Gévaudan, mountainous, uncultivated, and but recently disforested from terror of the wolves. Wolves, alas, like bandits, seem to flee the traveller's advance; and you may trudge through all our comfortable Europe, and not meet with an adventure worth the name. But here, if anywhere, a man was on the frontiers of hope. For this was the land of the ever-memorable BEAST, the Napoleon Bonaparte of wolves."

-- Robert Louis Stevenson, *Travels With A Donkey in the Cevennes*

It seems that winter is our season for wolves. As the cold settles into the land's every crevice, and the light begins to go, we hear them howling on the frigid boundaries of our subconscious. And sometimes, they don't stay out there. Sometimes, they're not entirely wolves. Something lupine (or some things lupine) came in, and went out, in midsummer two centuries ago, rending and tearing at the vulnerable throat of France's ancien regime. *La Bête Anthropophage du Gévaudan*, the Man-Eating Beast of Gévaudan, left behind almost a hundred deaths in an overture to the Reign of Terror, and made an uncanny exit with a bisociative silver bullet. Hunker down, then, and listen for the crack; of muskets, of twigs, of bones

"[A] wild animal, unknown in our climes, appears within them as suddenly as by miracle, without it being known from where it can come. Wherever it appears, it leaves bloody traces of its cruelty: fright and consternation are spread, the fields become deserted; the most intrepid men are paralyzed at the sight of this horrible animal, destructor of their species, and do not dare any more to leave without being armed; it is all the more difficult to be defended against its force, cunning, and surprises. It stalks its prey with an incredible speed, and in a very short space; as you know, it travels to various places extremely distant from each other; it prefers to attack the most tender age and the weakest sex, and even old men in whom it finds less resistance."

-- from the denunciation of the Beast, to be read from the pulpits of Gévaudan, by order of the Bishop of Mende

In June (around midsummer) of 1764, a young cowherd girl from Langogne, in the province of Gévaudan, in south-central France, became the first person to see the Beast. Her bulls frightened off the creature, which she described as a wolf the size of a cow. Later peasant girls, and children out of doors on errands or at play, would not be so lucky; the Beast killed a small girl that July by ripping the heart from her body. Over the next three months, the Beast struck again and again, savaging victims all across the countryside. When the Beast left corpses, their throats were ripped out, and often their livers were gone, presumably eaten. Sometimes the Beast left only scraps or single limbs; sometimes victims simply vanished. Occasionally, the Beast left survivors, whose consensus description revealed an enormous wolf, with a wide chest, long snout, enormous fangs, and a thin tufted tail. Its long hind legs could apparently propel it in leaps of thirty feet or more, and some witnesses saw a black spine of stiff fur running the length of the creature.

King Louis XV sent first a troop of cavalry, under the imperious Captain Duhamel, in October 1764. When Duhamel's tactics failed to capture the Beast (and succeeded in driving the province to near-rebellion), the King then sent the famous wolf-hunter Denneval to the region. Between February and June of 1765, Denneval killed 74 wolves in Gévaudan, but the Beast killed twenty or thirty more peasants in the same period. Denneval followed Duhamel into failure, and the King's personal gun-bearer, Antoine de Beauterne, arrived to take charge in July 1765. For three months, he studied maps of the area, plotted the reports of the killings, and then organized a final battue. On September 21, de Beauterne flushed the Beast, cornered it with nets, and shot it dead. He ordered the corpse stuffed, mounted, and shipped to Versailles -- the Beast of Gévaudan was no more.

"At the other extreme, we could accept that she was something unique in recorded human experience -- an alien, mutant, or surviving prehistoric monster. Only such explanations fully satisfy the records of her speed, elusiveness, and cunning. You can, of course, choose to dismiss La Bête as merely a large wolf but you will find those two very uncomfortable words 'and yet' keep coming to mind."

-- Derek Brockis, "The Beast of Gévaudan"

Except that it kept killing. The King, however, forbade the new ravages to be mentioned in French newspapers or broadsheets; the situation in Gévaudan had apparently become a critical lever for anti-royal propagandists both in

France and elsewhere. Gévaudan suffered alone through the winter, and into 1766. After the Beast's 96th kill (of an unidentified girl on June 18, 1767), the Marquis d'Apcher, the local nobleman, organized his own hunt -- and on Midsummer's Eve, 1767, a local poacher named Jean Chastel shot and killed the Beast with a bullet variously reputed to be blessed by an unknown priest, made of silver, or both. This corpse, too, after being exhibited around the province, made its way to Versailles, where the King ordered it hastily buried, local taxidermy not being up to de Beauterne's exacting standards.

We can dismiss the claims that the Beast was "just a wolf" with ease; Denneval, who knew wolves, and saw the spoor of the Beast, proclaimed it something different. Wolves, even two centuries ago, seldom attack men unless rabid, and rabid wolves do not make the clean marks of the Beast. The local peasants, of course, knew what it was -- the loup-garou, the werewolf. Cryptozoologist Andrew Gable goes the other direction, suggesting that the Beast was an unknown (possibly atavistic or prehistoric) species of pine marten. In his discussion, however, he unwittingly makes a pretty good case for a big wolverine, which jumps out of trees, attacks heads and throats, and is generally ferocious as all hell.

"If these things that may not be dogs be, their disappearances are as mysterious as their appearances."
-- Charles Fort, *Lo!*

But even wolverines don't have the ability to switch bodies, revive after being apparently fatally shot, dematerialize out of apparently solid traps, and leap thirty feet on level ground. For that, you need a fortean creature like the "vampire wolves" that plagued such locations as Limerick, Ireland in 1874, Edale, Derbyshire in 1925 -- and Orel, Russia in 1893, where that leaping creature (like the Beast) attacked only women and children, killed during the summer (unlike man-killing wolves), and was described as having a long muzzle and smooth tail. The Limerick and Edale cases, meanwhile, sound very much like the Chupacabra, the goatsucking vampire of mid-1990s Puerto Rico. Meanwhile, eyewitness evidence of the Chupacabra has the same long hind legs, extended snout, and black spine of fur as the Beast of Gévaudan! Another creature, again described in almost identical terms (which also strikes its human victims' head and throat), is the chemosit, or "Nandi bear," of Kenya. Over three centuries and three continents, the Beast leaps just ahead of its hunters.

"[I]t appears that he is neither a Wolf, Tiger, nor Hyaena, but probably a Mongrel, generated between the two last, and forming, as it were, a new Species."
-- from the *St. James' Chronicle* (June 6, 1765)

The African connection of the chemosit is intriguing, in light of the fact that de Beauterne's specimen (or its skin) actually turned up in the Paris National Museum of Natural History -- and has been conclusively identified as an African spotted hyena. Which, it turns out, may have been the one apparently owned by Jean Chastel's son Antoine, in a kind of local menagerie. Curiouser and curiouser -- because Chastel shot the Beast two years after de Beauterne turned over that skin to the museum. And because before that so-convenient skin reappeared (after almost 170 years in obscurity), forensic scientists, examining drawings of the wounds on the Beast's kills, definitively identified the Beast as -- a large wolf. Which is the one thing we know it cannot have been.

*"Paul will die at noon three leagues from the Rhône
Two flee the oppressed district of the Tarrasque:
As Mars makes horror his throne
The Cock and Eagle of France, Three Brothers."*
-- Nostradamus, *Centuries VIII:46*

While the Beast has its hunters chasing their tails, we can slide back out of the sunlit meadows of fact into the dark woods of mystery. The Catholic Church officially proclaimed the Beast to be a deformed wolf granted supernatural powers by God to scourge the sins of Gévaudan. Others have accused the Beast of being a propaganda tool (or demonic servant) of the Jesuits seeking to crush Huguenot remnants in the region while embarrassing the anti-Jesuit crown of France. The Chastels have been accused of serial murder (using their hyena as cover), and much is made of the reports of the Beast following a shadowy figure into the woods, and of the sightings of strange "fur-covered" men near recent Beast killings.

[Nostradamus](#), who lived just nearby, albeit two centuries earlier, gives us two interesting clues in his traditionally murky way. The Tarrasque, a fearsome monster (sometimes described, like the Beast, as a wolf the size of an ox), arose out of the Rhône River and laid waste to the land around (including Gévaudan) until he was stopped by St. Martha with a blessed chalice. Nostradamus seems to be predicting the Beast's coming; the "two [who] flee" may be Duhamel and Denneval, while the "Paul" who dies at noon may refer to the Beast's daylight decimation of the town of Paulhac (which is, sadly, rather more than three leagues from the Rhône) in January of 1767. Intriguingly, in this context he disturbingly places Trois Frères (Three Brothers) behind the national and royal symbols of France. Trois Frères, as it turns out, is a prehistoric cave in the Pyrenees (the Beast was often seen in similar caves near Sarlat), famously decorated with the image of a man clad in the skins of a wolf and wearing the horns of a hunter.

"What a career was his! He lived ten months at free quarters in Gévaudan and Vivarais; he ate women and children and 'shepherdesses celebrated for their beauty'; he pursued armed horsemen; he has been seen at broad noonday chasing a post-chaise and outrider along the king's high-road, and chaise and outrider fleeing before him at the gallop. He was placarded like a political offender, and ten thousand francs were offered for his head. And yet, when he was shot and sent to Versailles, behold! a common wolf, and even small for that . . . [yet] if all wolves had been as this wolf, they would have changed the history of man."

-- Robert Louis Stevenson, *Travels With A Donkey in the Cevennes*

Could Nostradamus have been hinting that an ancient [cult of werewolves](#) (possibly including the ghouls of [Glozel](#)) lay behind the royal lineage of France? Could the Beast of Gévaudan have been sent by the shadowy ultramontanist [Compagnie du Saint-Sacrament](#) to warn Louis XV that the true Merovingian dynasty (founded in part by St. Martha, and descended from a triune god) would soon reclaim its own? Was Jean Chastel an agent of the werewolves, or was he rather one of the [Red-Capped Jaegers](#), killing wolves for Liberté, Egalité, and Illuminisme? Does the Beast still lurk in the bisociative darkness between dimensions, like the Hounds of Tindalos, ready to strike when History is about to swing around again? What Revolution do the black ops hunting the Chupacabra through Puerto Rico seek to derail? It's up to you to choose which tracks to follow, and where to aim. But whatever you decide, keep quiet about it. Just hide it in the brush by the side of the path through your campaign's darkest, deepest forest. Like they say in the Gévaudan, when the twigs crack, don't whistle.

Romantics Vs. Simulationists, With the World in the Balance

Well, given how I'm back from the Valley of Death and all I got was a lousy T-shirt, it's time to get back to *coherent* random babblings.

For the next couple of weeks, I think I'll be looking at some of the presumptions of gaming, and try to figure out what they actually *mean* . . . and what it says about our hobby. (Or maybe in a week I'll realize these goals are too dang lofty and start babbling about Pringles . . .)

Anyway, there's an underlying struggle -- a basic presumption as to how games are played -- that seems so fundamental we don't even really talk about it (at least, it's never come up in any of the midnight ramblings with my gaming friends).

Namely, the choice between a Simulationist gaming experience and a Romantic one.

The Simulationist view holds that the goal of roleplaying games is to provide as objective and impartial an experience as possible, and that out of this objective view will come dramatic stories. The Romantic view holds that the goal of roleplaying games is to create dramatic stories directly.

(I suppose now I should explain my terminology a bit. Originally I'd used "Dramatic" in lieu of "Romantic," but I realized that 1) I would receive 870 emails from people complaining that Simulationist games can be dramatic, and 2) I get to use a bit of my English degree. In literature, the Romantic movement tended to create stories that were optimistic, with facts and realism getting little in the way of telling a good story; in general, the Good Guys won. By comparison, the Realistic movement tried to be as neutral as possible, creating stories that tried to be as realistic as possible. Sometimes the heroes won; sometimes they didn't. The Naturalistic movement was generally pessimistic, believing the world is a cruel and hostile place where only the strong survive. Generally the heroes didn't win; in fact, generally there *were* no heroes. For our purposes, I'm swiping Romantic for one label, and lumping the Naturalistic and Realistic movements together and calling it Simulationist. Sometimes the world is a staid dungeon of orcs and treasure; sometimes it's a Shoggothian horror.)

The Simulationist view tends to believe that Rules are Good; if it's heavily codified, it can be done correctly. Is the hero dangling off the edge of a ledge over a boiling cauldron of molten lead? Then the Simulationist would like to know precisely the chances of falling off the ledge, the rules for possible actions the hero can take to escape that situation, and the exact damage caused by the Vat-O-Pain. In this case rules, not the GM, are often meant as an adversary. If a hero gets poisoned and survives, it's either because he got lucky, or he took the correct actions necessary to survive; it's *not* because it's dramatically appropriate for the hero to survive.

The Simulationist view usually has plots that will unfold in a precise way. The nuclear bomb will go off at 5:35, even if the heroes are stuck in traffic. If the heroes are presented with a blind fork in the road, the left one will lead to the Time Critical Castle of Death and the right one will lead to the Dead End Chicken Shack . . . let's hope the heroes flip their coin well.

Point balance often isn't as important to Simulationist games. After all, people in the real world don't all have equal levels of advantages, disadvantages, and skills. Simulationist gamers may even prefer random character generation.

The Simulationist view usually tries to simulate reality as accurately as possible. If the heroes are stuck on a tough criminal investigation, and they're sitting around their office twiddling their thumbs wondering what to do, a well-timed matchbook will fail to find its way into the heroes' hands, the phone won't ring with a traceable call from the criminal mastermind, and a blonde bombshell almost certainly won't wander in with the treacherous twist necessary to get the heroes back on track. But the heroes' thumbs *will* be well-twiddled.

The standard dungeon crawl probably stands as one of the most perfect expressions of the Simulationist ideal. It's a closed environment, it's almost feasible to codify every possible action, and individual encounters can usually be discrete (since each dungeon room can be treated as a separate scene).

The Romantic side, on the other hand, tends to view rules as a necessary evil. After all, it's difficult to create dramatic situations without *some* guide work; the players will probably start to disbelieve if you start too many scenes with, "You find yourself locked in epic battle with Dr. Floon atop the bomb-carrying dirigible hovering over Copper City. And you're on fire." But the dice are meant to be a guide, not a binding contract; if the rules say the hero dies, but it's not dramatically appropriate for that to happen, then somehow the hero will live. (He may not be happy about it, but still . . .)

Plots in Romantic games tend to be more fluid; the nuclear bomb may be set for 5:35, but if the heroes are a bit late it will probably wait for them. (In fact, the nuclear bomb is probably set for a more nebulous time . . . like "as soon as my goon arrives with the plutonium.") If the heroes are presented with a fork in the road, then they probably won't make the wrong choice if it's crucial to the story.

Point balance tends to be a little more important in Romantic games; after all, when so much is left to the GM's discretion, point balance is nice to make sure those arbitrary decisions have some temperance to them. Yes, one hero might be a great swordsman, but another might have an equal level of dance skill. And the Romantic campaign will generally assure that, if a sword fight saves the world this time, then next week the fate of nations will rest on Disco A-Go-Go.

The Romantic game tends to strive to resemble other media . . . whether it's books, movies, TV shows, comics, or the epic anthems of Meatloaf. Reality isn't meant to be simulated, so much as the reality of the other media that is being emulated. Thus while the Bad Guy may get away in the real world, he'll generally be caught in the Romantic world (if that's the convention of the kind of stories being told).

The standard linear plot-point adventure is probably one of the most "pure" representations of the Romantic game view. In these kinds of adventures there are usually several pivotal scenes around which the rest of the game is woven; the heroes may get to control the order of those scenes (depending on how linear the adventure is), but unless they do something wildly unexpected ("The mayor may be evil! Better shoot him to be safe!"), they should get to play most of the adventure in a dramatic fashion.

Now, I don't think one game style is better than the other, and I suspect that many gamers tend to either combine the two worldviews, or use a Simulationist view for some campaigns and a Romantic view for others. (For that matter, there may well be an entire class of play style that I've overlooked.) But they *do* seem ideologically incompatible, and can be the cause of friction between gaming fans who favor -- and argue about -- one form over another. Next week we'll continue to explore these ideas, and see what kind of conclusions we can come up with.

In the interim, if you have any thoughts or comments, or just want to send me haikus extolling your preferred gaming style, feel free to drop an email to pyramid@sjgames.com, or stop by the [discussion boards](#) and join in the conversational bliss.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: Dragon Magazine #100, "Dragonchess" article (p. 38).

(Two stars) "Foul Air of Argument Technique . . . The character can cause a request, project or initiative to become the kiss of death for a bureaucracy. Meetings produce nothing, initiatives fall into pointless squabbling, and departmental infighting hampers even the slightest matters."

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



The Taking of the Twin Chalice

An Adventure Interlude for *Call of Cthulhu: Cthulhu Now!* or *Delta Green*

by Dylan Craig

Overview

The characters have stopped for supper at a roadside gas station and diner. As they dine, an abduction takes place in the parking lot outside. In the company of the manager of the diner, they give chase, and stumble into a nightmarish ritual -- hopefully in time to save the lives of the abductees.

Setup

The characters are approximately twenty miles out of town, headed overland by road toward their intended destination. The skies are clear and the night is warm and still. It is 8p.m., approximately two hours after sunset, and they are halfway through their dinner. The diner is otherwise deserted except for the manager/chef and waitress/cashier. Outside, cars pull into and out of the self-service station at irregular intervals. The surrounding area is uninhabited and uniformly pitch-black.

The Diner

Ray's is a steakhouse owned and operated by Ray Micklewhite and his wife Margaret, who also manage the gas station after hours. The diner offers both eat-in and take-out food, catering to drivers who prefer to pull off the road and stretch their legs as well as those who just want a foam cup of brew and a roast beef sandwich to consume as they drive. Taped classical music emanates from a portable stereo mounted above the cash register, the grill sizzles, the register dings. A screen of plastic ferns screens the diners from the sight of the driveway and their waiting cars.

A Shot, a Scream

The party's meal is interrupted by a single echoing boom from the driveway (Spot Hidden or Pistol skill roll to identify the sound as a pistol shot). A second or two later, there is the roar of a powerful engine and the screech of tires. By the time the characters can get to a position where they can see out of the diner, Ray is vaulting over the counter and Margaret and a man who was standing at the till are charging through the door in the direction of the shot. The taillights of a single vehicle are visible in the distance as it pulls onto the road and speeds off into the night.

The Victims

A woman is lying on the tarmac outside, shot in the head. She is being cradled by the man who was at the till, who is howling in anguish. Margaret is running towards the road, while Ray is dropping to his knees beside the woman to see if he can help. Unfortunately, she is beyond help; a single wound in her temple has blown a channel through her head. Automobile window glass is scattered everywhere, especially in her hair (Spot Hidden or Forensics skill roll will suggest that she was shot at short range, through a car window). There are two packets of takeout food lying on the ground beside the screaming man. The only other car in the lot (apart from the characters' own vehicle(s), and Ray and Margaret's ancient station wagon) is a battered pickup truck parked alongside the woman's body, with its passenger door open. The windows of this vehicle are intact.

A Call to Action

Ray yells at Margaret to come back. She does, screaming that "some old guy got out of that pickup, shot that poor woman, and drove off in her car." The man on the ground moans that his kids were in the car. Ray tells Margaret to phone the cops, and runs back inside for his shotgun and cell phone. As he does so, he yells at the characters to get their car started -- he intends to give chase and hopefully stop the fleeing car or at least call the cops on his cellphone and report on the direction it goes.

Hasty Preparations

The characters may wish to investigate the scene or ask Margaret or the wailing man exactly what happened. Each character has the time to perform two actions or ask either of the witnesses two questions before Ray arrives.

- **The children:** Marisa (female) and Jamie (male) are eight years old, twins, with blonde hair
- **The old man:** Arrived in the truck. Margaret says she has seen him before -- possibly, he lives in the area, or passes through it regularly.
- **The truck:** Is covered in dents and mud, and is at least fifteen years old. It smells strongly of rotten leather and burnt oil. It requires a Drive Automobile roll to get started due to a defective ignition. The glovebox contains a roadmap, a filthy rag, a half-empty packet of loose tobacco, and a shell from a .44 Magnum revolver.
- **The woman:** Her head wound (Forensics roll) is consistent with a large-caliber pistol wound at close range. She is dead. SAN loss for viewing her body (unless accustomed to violence and gore): 0/1.

Ray needs the characters -- or at least their vehicles -- as his own station wagon is not in the soundest condition. He will not accept "It's a job for the police" as an excuse; if that creep gets on the highway, or onto the back roads, the cops will never find him. He is not above ordering the party to help him, using his shotgun as leverage; he was a State Trooper before he retired and would far rather go to court on a Threatening Behavior charge than let innocent children get abducted. The more vehicles and sets of eyes the better, but if only a few of the characters are willing to assist him, he will go with what he has.

A Chase

By the time the characters (and Ray) get onto the road, the headlights are no longer in sight up ahead. Some reckless driving is required (Drive Automobile skill roll; failure indicates that the driver must slow down or crash). At least one vehicle must make 3 driving rolls out of 5 to be in a position to see a pair of headlights turn sharply off the tarred road onto a dirt road several miles up ahead. Ray swears, "He's on the back roads. Now we really have to chase the son-of-a-bitch; those roads are like a spider's web . . . thousands of places to hide." If the party's vehicles do not make at least 3 out of 5 driving rolls, they have lost sight of their quarry. They might still notice the dust trail left by his car, but this will require a Spot Hidden roll at 1/5 skill. Remember that Ray also gets a roll.

A Search

The characters are driving down a moonlit dirt road. A plume of bone-white dust marks the passage of each car; accordingly, the occupants of the lead car will note that the dust raised by the stolen car's passage is still thick and hangs over the road like a cloud even though they cannot see the car's tail-lights yet.

Suddenly, however, the dust trail stops as if cut off, and they are driving in clear conditions again. There is no sign of the car they were chasing. If the lead vehicle slams on brakes without warning at this point, Drive Automobile rolls are required from the drivers of the vehicles behind them to avoid a collision; inhabitants of both cars take 1 point of damage per full 10 points that this roll is failed by if a collision does occur, halved for those characters wearing seat belts (Luck roll if not specifically stated).

A careful analysis of the road confirms that the dust trail of the quarry vehicle stops suddenly, as if the car itself had

stopped in the road. Nevertheless, the car is nowhere to be seen. The level fields stretch off in all directions. There is nowhere alongside the road where the car could have been hidden. A successful Track roll shows a set of tire tracks swerving off the road at the point where the dust trail stopped, but they disappear -- literally, end in thin air -- at the point where they leave the road. Examination of a local road map (such as the one from the truck) will indicate that the road should branch here. But it does not, and there is no indication that it ever has.

A Path Revealed

The characters may stomp around in the fields as long as they like, but the solution to the mystery will only become apparent if a vehicle is driven off the road in approximately the same position as the tracks would indicate. In this case, there is a brief sensation of unreality followed by a horrendous visual effect where the roadside scene parts like overheated taffy, stretching and distorting until it settles into the same scene, except with the addition of a dust-trail-bearing dirt road corresponding to the one on the map. [SAN loss: 1/1d6].

The Hidden Road

The height of the dust trail indicates that the quarry is still several minutes ahead. The characters may continue along the road (unless any of their cars have been rendered unusable by collisions) uneventfully for several minutes, following the dust trail, until they hit a gravel stretch where the dust fades. Up ahead, a bridge over a creek is visible. Characters watching the road alongside the bridge may make Spot Hidden rolls; this will reveal that a set of muddy tire tracks lead from the creek up the opposite side of the bank; it appears that the abductor's car went offroad, crossed the stream, and drove up the opposite bank rather than drive over the bridge itself. Any characters making this observation may warn the driver before he or she reaches the bridge.

The bridge is unstable; any vehicle heavier than a motorbike will cause it to collapse, sending the vehicle smashing into the support span on the far wall of the creek bed. This will cause 1d6 points of damage to all the car's inhabitants, plus 1 point for each full 15 mph that the vehicle was travelling at -- once again, halved for those wearing seatbelts.

Up ahead, a darkened shape against the stars seems to be a farmhouse and barn.

A Sharp Welcome

A mud-spattered luxury car with a warm engine is parked outside the farmhouse. Three Glossolalians are lurking in the darkness between and around the farm buildings. Their stats, and description, can be found at the end of this document. One will attack almost as soon as the characters begin searching the homestead; the other two will circle around and wait until the party are distracted (possibly while examining the body of their cohort) before launching their attack.

A sharp grinding sound can be heard from the barn. Upon investigation, it becomes clear that the winch mechanism designed to drop the fourth Glossolalian onto the ground has jammed, stranding the thrashing creature a few feet above the ground. The barn is otherwise empty.

The Farmhouse

A single-story L-shaped building with a single entrance into a dining room/lounge. The building's windows are small, shuttered, and barred from the inside. No details of the contents of the rooms within can be made out unless the windows are smashed in.

Doors on either side of the bare dining room lead to a kitchen (to the left) and a study (to the right). A single door in the study completes the angle of the L, opening into a single bedroom and bathroom. Hannes Potgieter (see below) and Jamie are currently in the bedroom; Marisa is locked in a secret crawlspace concealed under the bed.

Hannes' Story and Motivations

Hannes' stats can be found at the end of this document.

Hannes was an anthropological researcher for the University of Amsterdam during the Second World War, studying the afterlife-belief structures of several isolated fishing communities along the coast of the Waddenzee. His assistant and companion in his work was his twin sister Janneke. During one of his resupply visits to Amsterdam, he was contacted by a fellow academic who occasionally acted as a spy for the Americans, who asked him to keep an eye on Nazi fleet movements. As a true Dutch patriot, Hannes agreed without hesitation, and for several months he sent back vital information on Nazi fleet strengths along with his research data. However, Hannes was discovered by the Nazis; while he was able to escape into the sheltering arms of the Waddenzee fishers, Janneke was captured and executed as a spy.

Repatriated to America after the war, Hannes refused to let the memory of his sister go. Drawing on whispered legends told to him by the fisherfolk, and combining them with his own research, Hannes grew determined to cheat death and return his sister to life. A half-complete necromantic spell referred to in occult texts as the "Ritual of the Twin Chalice" seemed to be his best bet; this spell would allow him to invest Janneke's soul into the body of another. However, for the ritual to become permanent, the caster's soul also had to be moved immediately afterwards, and its recipient had to be the twin brother or sister of the victim used to hold the Janneke's soul. Initially, Hannes tried to adopt a pair of twin children, but his unkempt appearance and shaky finances kept success from him. Finally, in 1958, he became desperate enough to kidnap two children from a playground and use them as the "Twin Chalice."

But something went wrong; instead of drawing Janneke's soul into the body of the little girl he had kidnapped, the poor victim became a screaming monster, babbling simultaneously in several voices and irredeemably insane. Hannes restrained the babbling thing in the cellar, but only after it had strangled its brother. He attempted the ritual again in 1971 and 1985; each time, the first casting of the spell created a gibbering, slavering creature bent on murder. On these two occasions, however, the creatures didn't kill their brothers; Hannes did, fearful of discovery. Details of these abductions and of Hannes' ghastly quest are recorded in various scrapbooks and journals in the study; photographs stuck between the pages also tell the story of a once-happy academic who was as surely killed by Nazi bullets as his sister.

Hannes knew that he would not be able to perform the ritual more than once or twice more before he lacked the power to fuel it. Since the last failure he has studied constantly, re-translated the ritual countless times, and memorized every last inclination and enunciation. Tonight, when he pulled into Ray's for a cup of coffee and a donut and saw the smiling blonde children in the car alongside, he knew that the time had finally come.

However, his hasty abduction has drawn attention to him, and he knows that he no longer has enough time to complete the full version of the ritual. As the characters arrive, he is hastily casting the lesser Incantation of the Twin Chalice spell, which allows him to switch his soul with another for a few minutes only. Accordingly, he has concealed Marisa under the bed, and clasped the struggling Jamie in an iron embrace as he mutters his spell. As soon as the spell is finished and he hears the sound of the characters moving around the house, he plans to run out of the room (in Jamie's body, leaving the disoriented Jamie staggering around in the room behind him) and head, screaming in mock terror, straight into the arms of the characters.

Once in this position, with the characters distracted by "Hannes" appearing, mumbling and naked, at the door, he plans to either grab a weapon from one of his pursuers or retrieve one of the pistols he has hidden around the house, and make use of the distraction to kill every last one of them before he runs out of time in Jamie's body. After he has dealt with his pursuers, he intends to retrieve Marisa and complete the greater Incantation of the Chalice ritual, binding himself into Jamie and Janneke into Marisa permanently.

If Hannes' body has been killed when his time in Jamie's body is up, his consciousness blinks out like an extinguished candle, and Jamie's spirit returns to its rightful body.

Marisa, once retrieved from the crawlspace, is unharmed.

NPC Stats

Ray Micklewhite

A fat, muscular man in his middle 50s, wearing an apron, jeans, and white T-shirt

STR 15 CON 13 SIZ 10 INT 11 POW 10

DEX 8 APP 9 EDU 9 SAN 45 HP 13

Skills: Grill Chef 60%, Shotgun 40%, Spot Hidden 35%, Track 15%, Dodge 20%, Drive Automobile 30%

Glossolalian

A mumbling female human wearing dungarees, a tight leather hood and harness, with scythes strapped into her hands

STR 11 CON 7 SIZ 10 INT 4 POW 19

DEX 15 APP Varies EDU -- SAN 0 HP 9

Skills: Scythe Attack 50% (does 1d6 damage; 2 attacks per round), Sneak 15%

Notes:

1. If a conscious Glossolalian's facemask and leather gag are removed, the ensuing babble of several obviously unearthly voices immediately causes a SAN loss of 1d4/1d10, plus 0/1 per day of continued exposure.
2. Glossolalians do not need to eat, drink, or breathe, as they are sustained by an immensely powerful flow of magical energy. This energy also augments their normal physical functions; they take one-third damage from non-slashing weapons (including bullets and shotgun attacks). They cannot be stunned or drugged.
3. When they are not roaming his property, Hannes uses a winch system connected to four meathook-bearing chains to winch and suspend these creatures off the ground by their harnesses (which have a built-in ring to accommodate the hook).
4. Hypothetically, if the spell affecting the Glossolalians could ever be reversed, they would revert to normal, although their SANs would still be 0. In this case, their POWs would also drop by 3d6.

Hannes Potgieter

A stooped and wracked old man with eyes lost in pits of shadow and a distracted manner

STR 6 CON 7 SIZ 10 INT 4 POW 7 MP 7

DEX 9 APP 6 EDU 17 SAN 15 HP 9

(in his own body)

STR 5 CON 7 SIZ 7 INT 17 POW 7 MP 7

DEX 15 APP 6 EDU 17 SAN 15 HP 9

Skills: Handgun 65%, Dodge 35%, Struggle Loose 40%, Cthulhu Mythos 13%, Pick Pocket 23%, Sneak 44%

Spells: Ritual of the Twin Chalice (greater and lesser versions)

Notes:

1. Hannes has several heavy revolvers concealed around the house, mostly .44 and .357 Magnums, but he will use an automatic if it is all he can lay his hands on.
2. Hannes' notes are treated as a tome, should anyone carry them away to read:

Notes towards a Dissertation on Resurrective Beliefs among the Fishermen of the Waddenzee (Dutch), +5%, x1, -2d6. Contains Twin Chalice spell -- greater and lesser Incantations. Effects as described above, require physical contact between the caster and the vessels. Greater Incantation is a two-part ritual costing 3 POW and 2d6 SAN, and requiring thirty minutes to cast; lesser Incantation costs 3 MP and 1d6 SAN, and can be cast in a single round, but only lasts 1d100+10 minutes. Greater Incantation requires a Luck roll for success; in the event of failure, victim becomes a Glossolalian as described above.

Designer's Notes: In Nomine Anime

by Genevieve Cogman



In *In Nomine* campaigns, there are some themes which keep on turning up again and again. Concepts such as the Archangel of Judgment going over the edge and Falling, the Archangel of Creation having a secret mission which will ultimately save Heaven, the Demon Princess of Freedom secretly wanting to be redeemed, the return of the Archangel of Purity, the triumph of Hell, and so on.

So, how exactly might these play out in *In Nomine Anime*, you ask me? An excellent question. Let's consider a few alternatives . . .

The Fall of the Archangel of Judgment

Some GMs like to follow a plotline where excessive strictness on Dominic's part, or collaboration with the Demon Prince of the Game (for the highest motives, at the time) have led him down a slippery path towards a Fall. This can unfold in different ways.

Decline And Bitter Fall

(Tragic Romantic)

Dominic's long hunt for heresy and treason has led him down the slope of cynicism into the belief that anything is justifiable as long as it protects Heaven -- and, of course, his is the only judgment that counts. Other Archangels support him without realizing the truth, or are too weak to oppose him. The angels must face the stern, cold-blooded servitors of the Inquisition, who honestly believe that they act for the good of Heaven, and who are prepared to torture or kill them for their own good. Handsome but naïve Laurencians, honest but mistaken Davidians, and others in Heaven stand shoulder to shoulder with the angels of Judgment. Can the angels find allies to shelter or support them while they endeavor to convince Dominic of his error, and to prove that Heaven *cannot* be saved by these methods? Will the innocence and compassion of the angels of Flowers heal the weary Archangel of Judgment, or must he perish by the wrath of Gabriel and Michael? Will it be war in Heaven?

Corruption In The City

(Noir)

The characters have jobs in a gritty down-and-dirty city, as police, private detectives, investigators, criminals, or similar dangerous occupations. If angels, they have to deal with demons on a regular basis, either as enemies or as occasional neutrals, and may even find some demons more congenial than their fellow angels. Slowly, their investigations and their demonic contacts reveal widespread collaboration between angels of Judgment and demons of the Game, with links on the highest levels, which can eventually be traced back to the Archangel and Prince. As their knowledge becomes evident, they will be pursued by agents of both sides, (falsely) accused of heresy by the Inquisition, and must gamble their lives and their hopes of salvation to get help from another Superior -- whether in Heaven or Hell. Gunfights, betrayals, trenchcoats, and at least one doomed relationship with an agent of the Other Side are mandatory.

The Redemption Of Lilith

Another popular theme is that Lilith is one of the more approachable Demon Princes, and may even have the potential for redemption. If so, who will she approach, and what will the result be?

Girls Just Wanna Be Green

(High School)

Characters are pupils or teachers at a high school with an extraordinarily high Lilim population; this is where Lilith sends her innocent young Daughters for basic education before they take up full-time jobs as Tempters. The heroes may be angels infiltrating the place, Lilim being educated, or a mixture of both: other angels and demons are doubtless present. Life is a mixture of crushes, adolescent angst, schoolwork not being done in time, cheating in class, martial arts or sports competitions (probably between angels and demons), everyone pretending to be normal humans most of the time, and inspections by agents of the Game trying to find grounds to close the school down. Occasional visits by Lilith herself prove her to be disgustingly cute, perky, and cheerful, just like her Daughters. Can the heroes persuade her to join up with Heaven? Or would they rather stay at school for a few years longer?

Techno-Apocalyptic-Tempter

(Weird Science Futuristic)

An unusual Lilim has been born from the parthenogenetic clone vats where Lilith creates her Daughters -- one with a conscience, who seems to be able to provoke moral behavior in her Sisters. She's on the run now, hiding in the mass of humanity, looking for angelic help. Will the heroes be able to gain her confidence, and navigate among uncertain Lilim and insane scientists to find out how she was created? How many twisted, misshapen, mutant Lilim are living in the slums and sewers? Is this innocent some sort of ultimate conscience for the whole race of Lilim, their free will given form and choosing to seek the path to Heaven? Is there anybody out there who *doesn't* want to vivisect her and examine her genetic structure? And if they bring her into contact with Lilith, can she redeem her Mother, or will the two of them both be doomed? Alternatively, players may be the unusual Lilim(s), trying to find out who or what they really are and to achieve their destiny, lost and alone in a world of mad science and untrustworthy strangers.

Eli's Wanderings

Many people -- including most of the Archangels -- would like to know why the Archangel of Creation has left Heaven and is wandering across the face of the Earth. He appears from time to time to his own Servitors, but gives no definite answers . . .

Eternity's Children

(Weirdness Hunters)

The characters believed that they're ordinary humans -- until they began to demonstrate strange powers. Now scientists are hunting them for their DNA, criminal conspiracies want to use their abilities, mysterious strangers are muttering about Heaven and Hell, and a street punk artist seems to be the only one who's willing to tell them what's going on . . . The heroes are descendants of the Grigori, angels outcast for the crime of breeding with humans (or maybe children of other celestials.) They must work together to discover their powers and their true nature -- and, maybe, to find their celestial parents. But what plan does the Archangel Eli have for them? Why is he encouraging them to develop their skills, and helping them to avoid pursuing angels and demons? Can they find out the truth before the Apocalypse?

Opening The Gates

(Fantastic Alternate Reality)

Strange gates are opening across the world, as Tethers to the Marches stabilize, and creatures from the Marches start to enter the world of humans. Elves, dragons, superheroes, giant mecha -- it's Eli's work, and most of the Seraphic Council wants his head on a silver platter. (So do most of Hell; this wasn't on their schedule for world domination at all.) Heroes have to try to sort out the fantastic creatures invading the modern world. Should they make exceptions for ethical or noble beings? Can they cope with the vampires and werewolves invading the sewers and forests? Why is Jordi collecting unicorns? How does one cope with a consortium of dragons allying with Marc to buy into the stock

market? Virtuous Martial Artists, Angstful Experts, and Innocent Power-Wielders are needed to fight the forces of evil, whether from Hell or from the Marches, and to rescue those young innocents who are wandering through the Tethers and into the Marches. And why has Eli disappeared now, at the moment of his triumph?

Oh My God! They Got Johnny!

Optional Rules for Snipers for *GEV* and *Ogre Miniatures*

by Eamon Honan

Francois breathed, slowly, steadily. "I am calm," he told his beating heart and trembling fingers. "I am calm," he told his shivering legs. Sweat ran down his back and pooled in his skivvies. His trembling stopped. He breathed again and let his hatred warm his belly.

He snuggled down in his sniper hole and reviewed his guns. He could see the troopers scurrying through the rubble. He flicked from camera to camera, watching the patrol as they made their way closer to the heart of the town. They had not taken the town yet and probably did not want to risk armor units in the warren of ruined buildings. He studied them intently, were they Americans, Brazilians, or British turncoats?

They were past half of his guns now, moving up into the killing ground. He couldn't pick out the officer. He frowned and activated his eavesdropping gear. The patrol stopped dead, conscious of the presence on their radio net. One stopped and tapped the side of his head, others moved forward in a wedge formation, scanning the surrounding area. He watched them, they were good, spread out at fifteen meter intervals. He would probably only get two or three. Probably American; their equipment looked good.

Fancois grinned and triggered the recording he'd made of the Argentinean two weeks before. "Madre dios, madre dios . . . help me momma, help me . . . holy Mary mother of God, pray for . . ." The soldier had cried for help in English, Portuguese and Spanish before he died. It was one of the more useful recordings in his library.

The patrol reacted quickly, fanning out, moving farther apart, using their suit sensors to search the area. Francois picked up curt orders over the net, sounded American all right. The guttural tones of English grated on his ears. He waited until the trooper second from the rear moved up, he flicked to his rear gun and drew a bead. He breathed in and slowly exhaled. It didn't matter with the remote controlled guns, but it was how he had been trained. He squuuuuueezed.

The gun sixty meters away barked once. The trooper took the 20mm round in the back and went down. Shouts and numbers and codewords rattled across the net. Two troopers rushed the gun, the second kicking his jets and lifting twenty meters into the air over the weapon's position firing his rifle as he went. Francois switched guns and tracked. He squeezed the trigger slowly.

The depleted uranium shell scythed off the troopers leg and the man corkscrewed downwards. There was panic in the air, frantic yelps of pain, screaming a prayer he thought. The squad hit the ground and hugged cover. Francois thought of his home, the lasers that had lit up the sky over Marseilles, fighting a losing battle against Combine cruise missiles, their beams searching the night sky, the bright light that left spots before his eyes. He could hear the sobs of pain from the wounded soldier over the radio net. Hatred warmed his belly again.

* * *

There were those who thought the sniper was as dead as the dodo at the beginning of the Last War. Proponents of massed armored formations slugging it out with nuclear weapons saw infantry as a necessary evil at best, a complete

irrelevance at worst. It was primarily through political pressure brought to bear on the Combine High Command by one of its elite infantry formations, the Marine Corps, that sniper survived on the Combine order of battle. The Marine Corps sniper was a specialist, armed with a large caliber accurized gauss rifle and an IR cloak that masked his heat signature and electronic countermeasures that spoofed the enemy's electronic detection gear.

Unfortunately, the Marine Corps sniper was as much an anachronism as his critics feared. A single man with a high powered rifle was simply too easy a target to find and kill. One round, maybe two, was the most he could expect to fire and survive the mission and even then he only had a fifty-fifty chance. Man-portable spoofing electronics were simply not good enough to mask his location for more than a minute of intensive scanning by even a squad of powered armor infantry. Drones made better and more cost effective scouts, depriving the sniper of one more of his roles. Marine corps snipers were reduced to forward observers, lasing targets for the artillery, a job they were overqualified for. Occasionally when intelligence got information that a senior officer was visiting the front lines, they would dispatch a sniper as an assassin. Otherwise the highly trained men who expected to be the terror of the battlefield sat in the rear areas teaching marksmanship to recruits and acting as errand boys for the artillery. Smart asses compared them to the cavalry of the First World War, highly trained, well equipped and completely useless.

It was left to the Paneuropeans to reinvent the sniper after their own elite marksmen were proved to be a bad investment of time, money and training. It was not a happy birth, but an innovation forced upon them by their own strategic reverses. The Europeans were outgunned, out-numbered and almost always on the defensive. In the aftermath of the invasion of France, lack of resources forced the Paneuropeans to consider more cost-effective ways of defense. It was a Belgian Infantry Chef de Battalion, James Ensor, whose unit had been taken heavy casualties in the battles around Brussels that was the father of the new system. Ensor's battalion had been asked to fight a series of holding actions to buy time for retreating troops to be evacuated. After his men had butchered the armor units sent to blast them out of their positions, the Combine sent in assault troops armed with flame-throwers and satchel nukes. The fighting was close and bloody and while the battalion accomplished their mission, they took grievous casualties in doing so. When battalion was sent to France for a period of rest and re-organization, Ensor had some time on his hands and began to experiment with better ways of fighting delaying actions, a function previously served by sniper teams. He took his ideas to the sub-committee on defense and had his ideas ignored. It took two long painful years and a unauthorized "field test" during a Combine probe into Alsace-Lorraine for Ensor to gain the attention of military men of influence. The central committee on procurement reviewed his ideas and prototypes (several of which had seen extensive action) and after one or two revisions, adopted them.

Ensors system was quite simple, a snipers role was still to sow confusion and to shake the confidence and morale of enemy soldiers. Advanced targeting and detection system made this impossible using standard sniping tactics. Ensors essential leap was the move the sniper away from his weapon and to multiply the number he commanded. Each sniper controlled an area approximately a mile in diameter, controlling between six to eight remote controlled 20mm rifles. Throughout this area were scattered cameras, motion sensors and other communications and detection equipment.

The sniper's job was to tie enemy infantry up for as long as possible by harassing them, sapping their morale and restricting their ability to move. A sniper must prevent enemy infantry bypassing his position by using long range fire to attract their attention and lure them into his area. Against enemy armor, the sniper has the choice of either combining fire from all his guns to destroy the vehicle (typically only possible with a light tank or GEV) or strip the vehicle of any supporting infantry leaving it open to an assault from friendly infantry. The more foolhardy try to play possum, allow their position to be over run and then attack the rear echelon units as they move in.

Game Notes

Prior to the game, the player (typically the defender) using snipers will place them in specific hex or on the board. A single infantry squad counter or miniature represents a sniper. The single squad does not have to be identified as a sniper until troops have moved into overrun combat with it. Snipers are static and once placed may not move for the rest of the game. A sniper may "fade away" and be taken off the board, the unit is not counted as destroyed and the opposing player does not gain victory points for it. A sniper may not "fade away" when there are infantry in overrun combat with him. When infantry move into overrun combat with a sniper, they may choose to either to try and flush

him out or move on.

Flushing out a sniper requires the unit to roll under its strength points on a die (d6). Should it do so, the sniper is either killed or frightened away. If the roll is equal to or above the units strength points, the unit is occupied and may not move or fire for a number of turns equal to the number of pips it failed by. The unit may then either move on or attempt to flush out the sniper again. The unit may still defend itself in overrun combat.

Example: A three-strength infantry platoon moves into overrun with what it believes to be an infantry squad. However, the squad is in fact a sniper. The platoon's player decides to flush out the sniper and rolls a d6. He rolls a three and fails to flush the sniper. His unit must spend one turn without moving or shooting, he may then try again.

Moving through the sniper fire is both difficult and potentially suicidal. The sniper may make a 1-1 attack against the unit, which may not fire back. On an X result, the unit loses one squad. On a D result, the unit is pinned down for one turn during which it may not move or fire. Pinned units may defend themselves in overrun combat.

Snipers may in a very limited manner engage armored units, by combining the fire from as many of their guns as possible and expending most of their ammunition, they may make a single Strength 1 attack on an armored unit. This may only be done once per game, after which they must "fade away."

Snipers can be attacked by long-range fire, however, they benefit from all the terrain benefits enjoyed by infantry (double defense in woodland, triple in city). The attacking units are simply pumping ordinance into the general area and hoping for the best, because it is very difficult to target a sniper who is well concealed. Consequently, the sniper is only killed on an XX result. On an X result, enough of the sniper's guns have been destroyed that he is rendered ineffective. The sniper is removed from the board, but no victory points are gained for killing him.

*(Editor's Note: For those without **Ogre Miniatures**, an XX result is any X in a column on the Combat Results Table after the first, i.e. for an attack of 1-1 odds, a "5" is an X result, and a "6" is an XX.)*

Unit Table

Sniper Attack 1 (special) Defense 1 Move N/A Mode N/A Size N/A
Points Cost 3

Notes on the Care and Feeding of Snipers

Snipers are specialist infantry much, like marines and engineers. Well-deployed, they can be devastating; badly deployed, they are a waste of points. Their immobility makes it impossible to re-deploy them if their initial placement is bad, so they should be placed where they can do the most good, in build up areas, forests, and revetments. They are strictly speaking an anti-infantry weapon, so they should be placed where you believe the enemy infantry is going to go. Snipers can be used in conjunction with normal infantry to create an anti-armor team. A sniper occupies the armor unit's infantry screen, while the infantry unit over-runs the armor. Secondly, holding a single infantry unit in reserve in a build up area defended by several snipers can be very useful. While the sniper occupies or pins the attacking infantry, the defending infantry sits back and pours fire into them from a distance.

Garnath Minarsson

A Virtuous Traitor For *Hero Wars*

by Jamie Revell

Background

Garnath Minarsson didn't always like the Lunars. He was born shortly before the Conquest, into a clan that vehemently opposed the invaders. (*Narrator's note: This should ideally be the same clan as the player characters hail from, but if that is a Peace Clan or similarly inappropriate, a close ally or neighbor may be used instead.*) He was a difficult child, and something of a loner, but not so much as to be remarkable.

When Garnath was nine years old, the adults of his Bloodline took part in a cattle raid against a neighboring clan, which went disastrously wrong. Garnath's uncle slew a priestess of the cow-goddess Uralda, and her clansfolk struck back with righteous anger, maiming many and leaving Garnath's own father, Minar, dead in the fields. Naturally, wergild was demanded from both sides, but as Minar was only a lowly cottar, by far the greater fine lay upon his clan. Of such things are feuds often made, but in this case, Garnath's chieftain was so shamed by the death of a priestess, and so afraid that the gods might be angered if restitution was not made forthwith, that he ordered the wergild be paid in full. Most of the final fine of ninety cattle was paid for by Garnath's Bloodline, which was economically crippled as a result. The young boy, already bereaved of his father, could only watch his relatives suffer still further for the actions of one man.

Never able to accept the justice of the decision, Garnath found himself further separated from his kinsfolk and his clan. Once he became an adult, he became a hunter, so as to spend as much time as he could away from the tula, and away from those whom he believed had betrayed him. It was there, out in the wilds, that the final break would come, two years before the campaign starts. He encountered a Lunar merchant caravan that had been set upon by a horde of Uz, who had killed and eaten as many of the humans as they could. Searching through the wreckage, Garnath discovered one survivor, a merchant named Tarala, who, although badly injured by sling stones and spells, had managed to escape from the carnage and hide in the underbrush. Seeing an innocent young woman with no combat skills, badly in need of healing and succor, the hunter resolved to carry her to safety and do what he could to help her recover from her terrible ordeal.

His clan, of course, was outraged. Not only were the Lunars invaders who had stolen their lands, but they consorted with the evil deities of the Predark, who could bring nothing but ruin upon the whole world. They demanded that Tarala be thrown back into the wilds, where she would surely die, thus ridding the clan of an evil enemy without any blame being traceable to them. Garnath refused, unable to see any evil in the frightened and helpless merchant. At first he faced down the clan weaponthanes, and demanded that a healer be brought. When none would come, he stood vigil over his charge, hoping that his kinsfolk would finally see sense. But it soon became clear, even to his stubborn mind, that the clan would not loosen their resolve, and were willing to use violence against him if necessary. He stole a horse from the chieftain's corral, and escaped into the night, never to return.

Garnath now lives in Jonstown (or other suitable city, at the Narrator's option), where he works as a native scout for the Lunars. None the less, he has not taken to the worship of Lunar deities, although he willingly cooperates with those who do. He still holds to the Heortling maxim "nobody can make you do anything" -- it's just that he no longer feels any affinity for his former kin.

Stats

Keywords: Hunter, Varanorlanth

Skills: Butcher 18, Close Combat (Spear) 8W, Close Combat (Unarmed) 6W, Craft Tools 20, Dragon Pass Geography 7W, Endurance 3W, Heortling Customs 13, Heortling Myths 10, Hide in Cover 4W, Know Local Area 5W, Know Prey Animals 18, Listen 19, Mimic Animal Sounds 20, Pelorian Customs 10, Ranged Combat (Archery) 4W, Ranged Combat (Javelin) 20, Ride 14, Running 12, Set Traps 17, Stalk 2W, Track 4W, Wilderness Survival 12W

Relationships: To Family 8, To Clan 6, To Lunar Empire 10, Ally (Tarala, Etyries Merchant) 15

Personality: Just 18, Loner 13, Patient 10, Stubborn 2W

Flaws: Afflicted by Yavorlings 13 (see Thunder Rebels p81; because of this, Garnath never wears any metal, uses stone-tipped spears and arrows and wears gloves while wielding his butchery knife).

Magic: Initiate of Varanorlanth 17, Combat 17, Movement 17, Wilderness Survival 5W

Adventure Seeds

Garnath is intended as a minor recurring villain in a Dragon Pass campaign centered on the Sartarite rebellion. He is basically a decent person who has been forced (as he sees it) to break the bonds of kinship that most Heortlings hold dear. Extremist rebel heroes will undoubtedly see him as a traitor, and want to deal with him accordingly. More moderate Heortling heroes might try to understand the causes of his betrayal, and should be given opportunities to return him to the fold. They may come to understand that the issues behind the rebellion are not so black and white as many would suppose.

For all that he has rejected his kinfolk, Garnath is still a Heortling at heart. If he were to discover a Lunar plot that struck at the core of his society's beliefs -- such as desecrating an Ernaldan temple -- he might well try and contact a rebel hero band and the leak the information to them. Will the rebels trust the Lunar sympathizer? And if they do, will they find themselves being lead into a trap after all?

Lunar heroes may find Garnath to be a useful ally, with detailed knowledge of their foe, and skilled in traveling the windswept hills of Sartar. But they should never completely trust him -- at least not unless they can convince him to join the Lunar Way wholeheartedly. If they ever did convert him, of course, he'd lose his special magic, although he might be convinced to join similar cults such as Doburdun or Kenstrata, and remain working as a scout, but this time working in further corners of the Empire.

Using Other Systems Or Settings

Garnath should need little conversion to work in Gloranthan campaigns using systems other than *Hero Wars*. If the GM only uses published *RuneQuest* cults, then Orlanth Adventurous would be the best fit. In other settings, such as Yrth, Garnath could be a former member of any close-knit tribal community, who has abandoned his heritage and taken to civilization -- a nearby civilization hostile to his barbarian kin would be especially appropriate. GMs should emphasize his survival skills, especially in campaigns where a typical warrior or hunter would not be expected to have access to magic to the same degree as they would in Glorantha.

Pyramid Pick

Dragonstar: Starfarer's Handbook (for d20)

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Written by Greg Benage & Matt Forbeck

Illustrated by Andy Brase, Darren Calvert, Mitch Cotie, Jesper Ejsing, David Griffith, Dave Lynch, Klaus Scherwinski, Brian Schomburg, Simone Bianchi, Jean-Pierre Targete, Kieran Yanner

178-page b&w/color hardback book; \$27.95

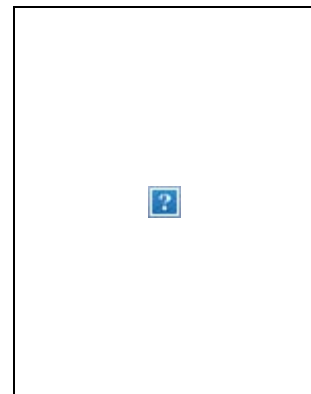
Over the years there have been several attempts to combine the rather vanilla flavored fantasy of *D&D* with other genres. *Ravenloft* added gothic horror, and wooden space going ships were added for a "Space 1492" feel in *Spelljammer*, but there has been no direct combination of classic fantasy and classic science fiction in an *D&D* setting. This situation changes with the *d20* system and *Dragonstar*, which is the first big science fiction and fantasy setting that is not merely an adaptation of an already existing game.

Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook is the launch title for FFG's new setting and the pattern of releases is modeled on the core *d20* books. Thus *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook* is the setting's equivalent of the *Dungeons & Dragons Players Handbook*, with everything you need to get started -- characters, races, feats, skills, combat and equipment -- but which is otherwise light on background. It does open with a sixteen-page color chapter giving basic information on the *Dragonstar* galaxy, but the DM will still need to buy FFG's equivalent of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the *Galaxy Guide*, before a gaming group can get the most out of this setting.

Millennia ago, the normally solitary dragons found safety in numbers as they traveled to the stars. They founded the kingdom, Quesemet, ruled by the gold dragon Khelorn. But a civil war ensued when the chromatic dragons founded their own kingdom, Asamet. After the war escalated to the point where an entire planet was destroyed, dragon kind took stock of the situation. Although it took another thousand years, a settlement unified the two kingdoms into the Dragon Empire to be governed by the ten royal draconic houses. Every thousand years a new dragon from the next house in the line of succession takes the throne; so far, this system has lasted six thousand years. The current emperor is Mezenbone, a red dragon, making this the Red Age, which has another nine hundred years to run. Under Mezenbone, the Dragon Empire has expanded aggressively; sending legions into the outlands to bring numerous worlds into the empire, often under the command of the Drow dominated Imperial Special Police Directorate.

While magic is highly prevalent, not everyone can command the arcane forces, and even those that must study to do so, such as wizards, are not as highly regarded as those to which it comes naturally, such as sorcerers. On the other hand, science and technology can be easily understood, easily mass-produced and wielded by everyone from the lowest of commoners up. However, science does have its limits and the ability to travel faster than light is one. This is when magic comes into its own, because through arcane methods, one can break, or at least circumvent the laws of science. Each starship is fitted with an artefact called a "Starcaster" and its Astronav computer, used to plot teleport jumps. Both are constructed and linked together -- destroy one and the other cannot be linked to a replacement.

Wherever ships go in the Dragon Empire, there is one striking fact about the galaxy -- its uniformity across races and tongues. Orcs, Dwarves, Humans, Elves, Halflings, Gnomes and so on are essentially the same everywhere. The reason for this is simple. The gods wish it so, just as they allow magic to operate in a world of science and technology.



After the first chapter, which explains the basic background, *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook* provides everything required to play in this setting bar the full background. The next eight chapters cover races, classes, skills, feats, equipment, combat magic, and vehicles. The grayscale layout is very clean and despite using several artists, they each get across a feel for the Dragon Empire and the flavor of the outlands. There is an occasional error in the order of entries, so that (for example) the Hacker and Implant Spellware feats come before Etiquette, but this is a minor quibble. If I have a complaint about the art, it is that none of the equipment illustrated is actually named. This is particularly annoying for the weapons as every player surely wants to know what that cool gun in their character's hand actually looks like. Oh well, this is sure to be rectified with an equipment guide.

In the Dragon Empire you play any one of the races and classes to be found in the *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* rules. This could be your Dwarven fighter from the fantasy campaign, where the DM has decided to integrate the world into the Dragon Empire, but *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook* is really about characters that already live under the banner of Mezzenbone. The races chapter looks at each of the basic races in turn, explaining their place in the empire and their relationships with other species. Except for humans, all races receive new racial traits. Dwarves have gravity sense, Elves receive bonuses to their Freefall and Biology skills, and Half-Orcs receive bonuses to their Demolitions skill due to their violent nature. Interestingly, Halflings receive bonuses to the Piloting and Use Device skills because their size makes them excellent spacers, but the tinkering nature of Gnomes is played up as they have inclinations toward the hard sciences and technology.

Indeed, Gnomes feel that it is the highest achievement to each create a Soulmech, one of the new races in *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook*. These are robotic constructs that have been given animation and free will by binding a soul directly into them, through the Soul Bind spell. An expensive process, these new beings with old souls, often find themselves beholden to their creators. The other new races available are the Drow, Orcs and Half-Dragons. These latter have a dragon as one of their parents and gain social status for this. But few live for anything other than riches and a pampered existence. The fact that you can play a member of an evil race, such as the Drow or Orc, is covered by the suggestion that not all members of the race are actually evil. Further it is imperial law that an individual be judged by their deeds rather than what is in their blood. Outside of the races given in the *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook*, any monster race can be used as the basis for a character, subject to DM approval, as they can all be found somewhere in the galaxy.

As with the races, the classes have been reworked slightly to fit the setting. The monk hardly changes at all receiving the new class skill of Freefall, whereas the paladin becomes the sacred warriors of the unification church. They lose the right to a special mount at eighth level, can face prosecution for the wrongful use of Smite Evil, and may have to associate with Drow officers of Mezzenbone's Imperial Special Police Directorate. New classes include the pilot and mechanist (which is the preferred class for Soulmechs), and after discussing the prestige classes found in the core books, provides yet more: the Gundancer -- Monks who have embraced the use of firearms -- *Feng Shui*-style, the Negotiator, and the Technomancer, who try to combine mastery of both magic and technology. A nice touch is that *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook* also revisits the basic NPC classes and gives us the Thug, the rogue's equivalent of the fighter's warrior class.

The examination of the original and presentation of the new continues with skills and feats as they work in the Dragon Empire. The most important new feat is Technical Proficiency, which allows characters to use most common technological devices and learn to use others. It is a pre-requisite for several other feats, including Starship Piloting, Armored Proficiency (Powered), and Autofire. In general, the Technical Proficiency is a free feat gained by all citizens of the Dragon Empire, but those from the Outlands can also take it as a new one later in their careers, after they have spent some time in the empire. Other interesting new feats include: Dragonblood -- the blood of dragons runs through your veins, giving a natural affinity for arcane magic and make the sorcerer the favored class in addition to your race's; and Implant Spellware, which seems to allow devices to be powered by spells like Darkvision and Enhanced Strength and for them to be implanted into a recipients body. This would appear to be the *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook*'s equivalent to cyberware, but we need to wait for the *Galaxy Guide* before we will know more.

From guns to robots, the equipment guide covers everything an adventurer might need to carry. There is nothing particularly radical about this section and these are pretty standard science fiction RPG gewgaws. Vehicles and space ships, including their operation are covered in a separate chapter, which includes the deck plans for the small two man

explorer class star ships.

The combat section works to integrate firearms into the standard *d20* game, but points out that firearms are going to dominate most battlefields. The new rules cover firearms used in melee, friendly fire, attacking through cover -- some weapons are rather deadly, suppressive fire, and the ever-popular auto fire. Along the way the chapter discusses the various types of guns and dispenses a little tactical advice for those used to pure swordplay.

Magic does not work all that differently in *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook*, but how its casters use it is different. Although sorcerers gain the status granted as instinctive spell casters, Wizards can actually make use of the technology. Spells are stored on datapads, which means the need for more space can be covered by the purchase of an upgrade package and the transcribing of new spells needs nothing more than an electronic stylus. Spells can be downloaded from the InfoNet or another data pad and with the right software, spell books can be used to create the digital equivalent of scrolls.

As before the chapter on magic looks at how *d20* magic works in the *Dragonstar* universe, first with general principles and then spells on a case-by-case basis. The spell Flaming Arrow (and any other that affects projectiles) works on bullets as well as arrows! Leomund's Tiny Hut, everyone's favorite nightly refuge even works in outer space! There are over thirty new spells which range from the mundane Refuel; Repair and Inflict Light to Critical Damage on any object or item; and Endure Radiation; to the fun Power Down, which shuts down electrically powered devices . . . even Soulmechs; and its immediate answer, Instant Reboot. The Irradiate spell, which is similar to the spell Sunburn but which fires off beams of high intensity radiation, causing damage and radiation poisoning, is rather vicious. Unfortunately, we will need the *Galaxy Guide* to learn the mechanics and effects of radiation poisoning.

In making use of the *d20* system to power their game systems, many publishers have still forced gamers to radically rethink how their characters are placed in the new world and how they operate. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in this as gamers do this every time they pick up a new RPG. But *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook* does not do this and I would argue that it is less and more than a *d20* system game. Rather this is *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition in Space*.

What this means is that a die-hard *D&D* player can very quickly go from the *World of Greyhawk* or the *Forgotten Realms* with little more to learn. Indeed both of these planets, plus any *D&D* world could be incorporated into the Dragon Empire or be placed along the Outlands ready for integration into the Empire. I cannot even think of a *D&D* setting that could not be so integrated, including *Spelljammer!* In this way, the setting lives up to FFG's tagline, "Take Your Adventure To The Stars!" There are shades of both Holistic Design's *Fading Suns RPG* and Games Workshop's *Warhammer 40K* universe in *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook*. (Indeed, were you to add psionics by using WotC's *Psionics Handbook*, you could use *The Starfarer's Handbook* rules for the *Warhammer 40K RPG* that Games Workshop promised but never released . . .)

A *Dragonstar* campaign can be played from both ends, as citizens of the Empire working along the Outlands encountering strange new worlds or as inhabitants of those worlds being invaded by the Empire. Inspiration for the latter could come from Poul Anderson's *The High Crusade* -- I'll be raiding my Dragon Archive CDs for the appropriate article, or *AD&D's S3, Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* and *Night of the Comet*. For the former, the prospective *Dragonstar* referee should be raiding their gaming collection for suitable adventures.

One problem with *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook* is the lack of background material . . . but there was not much in the *Dungeons & Dragon's Player's Handbook* either. What little there is, both in the first all-color chapter and scattered throughout the book, is at least intriguing and inspiring for the reader. It is almost enough that you do not need the *Galaxy Guide* to get started with a *Dragonstar* campaign and in some ways, I would like to see more adventures than source material . . . perhaps in the Adventure Booster format.

If you are a DM looking for a *d20* science fiction game then either the *Dinosaur Planet: Broncosaurus Rex, Star Wars*, or *Fading Suns* RPGs are your first choice. If you instead want *D&D3e in Space*, then *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook* is exactly what you need.

--Matthew Pook

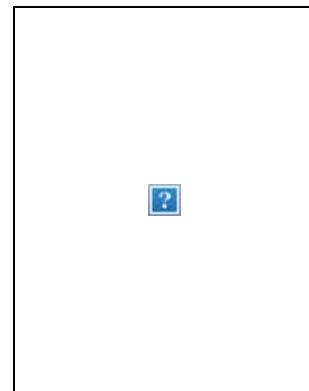
Pyramid Review

Song and Silence (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by David Noonan and John D. Rateliff

96 pages; \$19.95



The latest installment in the guidebook series for *Dungeons and Dragons* features the two most urban character classes: bards and rogues. While these two classes are quite possibly the most versatile of classes, this book primarily focuses on the two most popular aspects of these classes: music and thievery. There's also a few goodies tossed in for the assassin prestige class.

So, let's break out the old formula and go through the chapters.

Chapter one is the goody that seems obligatory for any *D&D* supplement: prestige classes. And they offer some jim-dandies in this one. For those pining for the days of *Unearthed Arcana*, there is the return of the thief-acrobat, now reworked as a prestige class. Also, there is the Fang of Lolth, which starts with the assumption that a PC tries to access an artifact not meant for humanoids with a Use Magic Device roll. Hijinks ensue.

The rest of the prestige classes, while they are interesting and fulfill crucial roles, do not make stretch the genre my motor run and the way that the Fang of Lolth does. Yes, the crime-fighting Vigilante, the Robin Hood-ish Outlaw of the Crimson Road, and the swashbuckly Dread Pirate do exactly what a prestige class is meant to do: help to define a setting. Got a port city with ships going in and out of it? Sure, Dread Pirate is a possible branch for a character there. It'd be pretty cool to play, in fact. But on the down side they just aren't breaking new ground with some of these.

Also, as can be expected when you have a diverse assembly of prestige classes, not all of them are particularly useful. For example, the Dread Pirate is a cool prestige class. Reading through it, they got some pretty slick abilities that could be fun to play. So, I think to myself, "Could my character go into this prestige class?" Well, the first problem is that not everyone in your party is necessarily a sailor. Which means that either the Dread Pirate will be pirating alone, the rest of the party gets dragged unwillingly onto the ship, or the Pirate is a Pirate without the ability to use the ship he had to own to gain the prestige class . . . it just doesn't fit down dungeon corridors. The second problem is that *Dungeons and Dragons* is a little geared towards . . . dungeons. The information provided for ships explain how long it takes to get from Point A to Point B, not how to use them in combat. It's not really designed for a career of sailing the high seas, getting scurvy and attacking ships loaded with ducats. This might fit neatly in a sourcebook about adventures on the high seas, but seems a little awkward here.

And, as a final quibble (I promise this is the last before I move on to the next chapter), only one of the ten prestige classes has an obvious link to bards: The virtuoso. All the others have more of a roguish slant to them.

Chapter Two is called "Skills and Feats," though most of the chapter is really about how player characters can build their own traps using the Craft (trapmaking) skill. One might opine that this should be in its own chapter, but it's probably placed into this chapter because the volume of other material is significantly smaller in comparison. Besides, I think they're trying to follow a similar formula as the other books in the series. For those not interested in having your player character make traps of his very own, there is a handy section on how you too can make poisons. There's a section on how to use Hide, Bluff and Spot while following someone, a section on concealing weapons, a section on making tumbling more difficult, and then there's the feats.

The feats are all really cool, though I was of mixed feelings regarding the inclusion of a few feats that were originally

printed in the *d20 Star Wars RPG*. While they are all cool feats, and I'd have stolen them from *Star Wars* anyway, it was something of a disappointment to see reused material.

Chapter Three is "Bard and Rogue Equipment." A big chunk of the beginning of the chapter is all about musical instruments a bard can use. They do a few interesting things here. First is the fact that they've given up on *AD&D 2nd Ed*'s tendency to give historical perspective on an item, and instead have created their own histories for the instruments in question. So alpenhorns are now an invention of giants. Goblins have a long tradition of using bongo drums. And apparently dragons have pioneered the conversion of a hookah into a musical instrument. (Personally, I never imagined dragons being that mellow.)

The second interesting thing is that they have applied bonuses to different bardic abilities when using a particular instrument. Drums are good at inspiring courage, but bad at helping people resist charm effects. The lap-harp allows you to have multi-task with your bardic music, creating new effects while sustaining old ones. The whistle-pipe is good for use in countersongs. And so forth. While it may seem like some strange number-crunching exercise designed for min-maxers, it does have the effect of having players suddenly care what kind of musical instrument they have, rather than just wanting something cheap.

Also in this chapter are some new weapons, the most notable being the garrote and the musical instrument bayonet, though there are other nifty items as well. The garrote in particular smacks of "something kinda new" that helps to think outside the box of, "I hit the monster with my sword," particularly when combined with the rules for using a garrote provided later in the book. There's also a section on thief gear, with items that are useful but not exceedingly so, as well as magical items. The magical items are particularly neat, providing some items that just seem intriguing and pretty useful. My personal favorite is the Thief Catcher, a book that eats people who try to read it without permission.

Chapter Four is "Organizations for Bards and Rogues." This chapter provides ten generic types of thieves' guilds, with occasional specific examples, as well as a half-dozen bardic colleges that your PCs can aspire to join. One of the great parts of this chapter is that it actually provides ways to include these organizations into your games without having players be members in them. Which means there are lots of plot hooks to nab your players with when they're tooling around your favorite *D&D* city.

The organizations presented in this chapter are well thought out. The types of thieves' guilds presented provide a pretty decent representation of what you can find in a given city. The bardic colleges are diverse, and range from groups of knowledge hording scholars to an ill-reputed groups of bards obsessed with the study of death to the point that some will speed the process along. The latter group, called "The Lamenters' Order," is the first thing to get me excited about bards in a long time.

Chapter Five is called "You and the World Around You." The first part of the chapter, which comprises the bulk of the section, is all about bards and rogues from a roleplaying perspective. It has great commentary on the scope that is possible with these classes. Rogues aren't just thieves. They can be tricksters, explorers, and even leaders. Bards aren't just musicians, but jack-of-all-trades who blend in the strong points of multiple classes. They also discuss how they may relate to other classes, possible motivations they may have for adventuring, and general strategies for how to play their strengths.

The end of the chapter, however, is combat rules. Not much, mind you. . . just help in clarifying how flanking works, as well as detailed rules for how to garrote someone with the weapon they describe back in Chapter Three. But, still, it's a bit of a jolt after the frothingly good pages about roleplaying.

Last, but not least, Chapter Six is simply "Spells." It primarily focuses on music and sound oriented spells for bards, though there's a few new assassin spells for those who just love that prestige class.

As for the overall presentation of the book, there isn't much to say. The art is decent. The layout is clean and crisp. I haven't noticed any typos. Some of the chapters are prefaced with quotes from the wacky stock characters they introduce in the *Player's Handbook*, like Redgar and Lidda. "How do you do that?" asks Redgar at the beginning of Chapter One. "It's all in the wrist, just . . . like . . . this!" Lidda replies. Those crazy kids.

End verdict? It's a good book. It's not mind-blowing. It isn't going to win any awards. But, it fulfills its purpose. If you play **D&D** and you've bought the other four books in the series, no harm would come of picking this one up. It has useful rules for the game, and some kernels of coolness nestled within its pages that you could possibly even apply to other games.

--*Jeremy "Bolthy" Zimmerman*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Part of a Simulation Nation

This week we continue the topic started [last week](#): Pringles. Er, no . . . varying views of gaming. This week I take a gander at the Simulationist view, and what (in my mind) it has to offer.

With few exceptions, almost every sport movie has a universal annoyance for me. Namely, that the climactic moment of the film is usually The Big Game, where The Fritterstone Underdogs are facing the Snotschool Jackasses, and it's the fourth quarter/ninth inning/third period/eighteenth hole, and the score is Dramatically Close . . . you know what I mean. It all comes down to the bases-loaded grand slam, the fourth-and-inches touchdown, the last-second three-pointer, the final putt . . . whatever.

(An exception to this in recent memory was *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, where the rules of Quidditch are such that everyone else on the field putters around, moot, 'til the Seekers get their act together and decide the game. Of course, the climactic game occurs halfway into the book/movie, and is merely one of eighty-seven million climactic moments to spring out of J.K. Rowling's skull . . . so I guess I can forgive her.)

Now, that Dramatically Close ending immediately causes two problems.

The first problem is, once you get to the Dramatically Close ending, you can only generally go in one of two directions: You either win, or you lose. There are few exceptions to this; most of them involving Zeus being lowered by a rope from a giant apparatus suspended over the stadium. Again my old Creative Writing courses rear their judgmental heads. As soon as you know you've narrowed it down to a Boolean outcome, you've taken away a lot of the dramatic tension out of that scene; no longer is the story a place where anything can happen . . . now it's a place where two things can happen. Oh, and as a hint . . . generally the Bad News Bears win. (For Random Thinkers, I'd point out that I discussed this problem with regards to combat [many moons ago](#), then discussed how I solved the problem [the next week](#).)

The second problem is, as anyone who has watched sports more than once knows, those last-second type of dramatic victories just generally don't happen. You can watch your favorite team all season long and never see that last-second Dramatically Close ending. My own alma mater of Florida State University, for example, traditionally turns opposing teams into tapioca pudding (although last season was the worst I'd yet seen, even losing a game to the Nova High swim team). Most games are fairly boring on paper; 5 to 2 for baseball, 21 to 3 for football, and so on. Most Super Bowls, the most-hyped sports event in America, traditionally have blow-out scores that makes one wonder if the opposing team, in fact, remembered to show up.

(At this point I also feel obliged to note that basketball, for whatever reason, seems to be designed for more exciting endings than just about any other sport. Although I don't think of myself as a sportshead by *any* definition, if I'm channel-flipping and encounter the ending of a basketball game, almost invariably I'll stare slack-jawed at the screen for those last two minutes. Of course, I'll frequently do the same thing for a cat food commercial I find amusing, so I wouldn't read *too* much into this . . .)

Now the interesting thing, in my mind, is that despite the lack of these exciting climactic moments, sports are still wildly popular the world over . . . certainly more popular than most sports-based movies. Why is that?

Well, I have a few theories . . . and they tie into what I feel the biggest appeals of Simulationist RPGs are. The biggest is that the excitement of both of these stems from within, not without.

In other words, there's a basic situation (two teams facing each other, a score set to zero, and so on). And anything exciting happens because of the actions of those two teams. If one team pulls a brilliant sneak play and outwits the opposition's defenses, then that's exciting . . . and dramatic. And those dramatic moments can happen at any time, not just because the referee/director/GM decides this is the best opportunity to craft an exciting moment.

Likewise, any defeats the heroes suffer are their own; if they manage to barely escape with their lives from the

rampaging hordes, that escape becomes its own reward.

(As an aside, over on the [discussion boards](#) one player talked about how the GM killed her character even though he should have lived, because it was dramatically appropriate for that character to die then. That is a naughty, naughty GM, and he gets no biscuit.)

To continue the sports analysis, within the confines of a game, *anything* can happen. One side might score a hundred points and the other side score none. A player might run the wrong way, scoring for the other team. A player might, sadly, get injured or even *die*. Using a rigid framework, ironically, may well provide more freedom for dramatic possibilities; provided you stay true to the game, It can be the difference between riding a roller coaster and driving a car; although the former seems to be more frightening and exciting, those on the ride know that, in all likelihood, the danger is all illusory. (No matter how fast you spin the teacup, it won't break loose.) Not so with driving a car; you have the freedom, while driving in a parking lot, to floor it suddenly and smash into the side of the mall. You almost certainly *won't*, but the limitless freedom you're allowed in a car can be both exiting and liberating. So, too, can a Simulationist game; knowing there aren't any tracks to keep you safe and pointing in the right direction, and being given the freedom to do (or not do) what you want can allow for much more exciting sessions.

To escape from sports and go to another example (which may or may not be related to gaming), take a traditional "mystery." This could either be a *How to Host a Murder* game, one of the old *Crime and Puzzlement* illustrated mysteries, or any of the more "interactive" mysteries (like the old Infocom detective adventures). Or it could be a mystery in a roleplaying game. Anyway, presumably the heroes are given the clues, suspects, and avenues in some fashion to pursue. In all the mystery examples I named, the Simulationist pursuit of the game would be (in my mind) the most satisfying. In this way the player(s) need to sit down with the clues, investigate, and come to a conclusion. It's most satisfying to realize that you figured out what happened on your own, without a fate-provided clue or last-minute hint to save the day.

Of course, the corollary to this satisfaction is that it's entirely possible the heroes *won't* figure out the mystery . . . the bad guys get away, the mystery goes unsolved. And if the purpose of roleplaying is for everyone to have fun, then it's entirely possible that the players *won't* have fun in this situation Just like watching an action movie where the bad guys win, or a mystery that's never solved, many people don't consider games that aren't exciting or inherently dramatic to be a waste of time. (As an aside, foreign movies tend to be a *lot* more liberated in breaking these views than American films; it's entirely possible for a foreign film to have a less-than-optimum ending, where the good guys die and the bad guys win [if good and bad can even be determined]. I think this is great, personally, but the traditional movie-going audiences here tend to disagree . . . if they hire a babysitter, they want to feel good.)

Next week we'll continue our discussion. I'm not sure if I'll keep talking about the Simulationist ideal, or move on to the Romantic view. Let's play it by ear, eh?

* * *

Ken Hite needs to take the week off so he can work on Top Secret projects . . . absolutely *none* of which involve an eel, electrical tape, and an Etch-a-Sketch. Hopefully he'll be back next week.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: Exalted RPG, p. 205.

(*Four stars*) "As bumbling as this comic duo are, it should always be remembered that they can be dangerously effective. . . . If only one of them is present, it will be Skeeve. The odds of baiting Aahz into an adventure away from his apprentice are so low they can't be considered seriously."

Charles A. Lindbergh

by Joe Taylor

Total Points: 444

Born 1902; died 1974

Age 28; 6'2"; 160lbs.

Attributes: ST 13 [30], DX 12 [20], IQ 12 [20], HT 14 [45].

Basic Speed: 6.5 Move: 6

Dodge: 6 Parry: 8 Block: 4

Advantages: Acute Vision +2 [4], Combat Reflexes [15], Courtesy Rank 6 [6], Filthy Rich with Multimillionaire [75], Imperturbable [10], Literacy [0], Reputation +4 (first person to fly nonstop across the Atlantic) [20], Single-minded [5], Status 7* [25], Strong Will +2 [8], 3-D Spatial Sense [10], Very Fit [15].

* Includes +2 for Wealth.

Disadvantages: Chauvinistic [-1], Intolerance (reporters) [-5], Sense of Duty (to America) [-10], Stubbornness [-5].

Quirks: Enjoys the outdoors and remote places; Moves often; Pays for his own business expenses; Reclusive. [-4]

Skills: Animal Handling-9 [1/2], Archaeology-9 [1/2], Aviation-17 [12], Bard-11 [1], Biochemistry-11 [4], Boating-10 [1/2], Brawling-12 [1], Carpentry-12 [1/2], Diplomacy-11 [2], Disguise-11 [1], Driving (automobile)-13 [4], Ecology-9 [1/2], Electronics Operations (communications)-11 [1], Engineer (vehicles)-11 [2], Guns (pistol)-18 [16], Guns (rifle)-18 [16], Guns (shotgun)-15 [2], Hiking-14 [2], Mechanic (gasoline engine)-11 [1], Mechanic (propeller plane engine)-13 [4], Motorcycle-12 [1], Navigation-18 [10], Orienteering-16 [Default], Parachuting-13 [2], Physiology-10 [2], Piloting (single-engine prop)-22 [64], Piloting (twin-engine prop)-20 [8], Politics-10 [1/2], Swimming-12 [1], Writing-12 [1].

Languages: English (native)-12 [0]

Equipment: While traveling, Lindbergh packs as light as possible, but often carries one or more firearms.

This represents Lindbergh from 1927 to 1932, during the period between his flight to Paris and the kidnapping of his son. His wife, Anne, would probably be worth 76-100 points and might count as an ally; their children would rate as dependents. Before his famous flight, remove Status, Reputation, and Courtesy Rank. After 1939, give him a Reputation -4 as a Nazi sympathizer and lower his Status to 6. In 1954, his Courtesy Rank becomes that of General. During his lifetime he pursued a wide variety of interests, and the GM could justify giving him 1/2 point in just about any skill.

Biography

What If?

Though it may seem like a trivial event historically, Lindbergh's flight had far-reaching effects, mostly because of what he accomplished after achieving international fame. Turning down over five million dollars' worth of movie deals and endorsement offers, Lindbergh used his fame to greatly assist the aviation industry. Had he died before making his flight to Paris, or if someone else made the flight first, history would certainly be affected. Aviation at the time was a risky business; Lindbergh could have easily been killed at any point before his flight to Paris. Alternately, someone could simply beat him to it; a French team making the attempt was declared missing only just before Lindbergh took off, and an American team was ready to go at the same time. Whoever crosses the Atlantic in Lindbergh's place would be in a position of great influence, which might prove

Charles Augustus Lindbergh was the son of a Minnesota congressman, and grew up with a love of the outdoors and a fascination with airplanes. At the age of 18, he tried to study engineering at the University of Wisconsin, but other than showing an aptitude at mechanics and placing first on the nationally-ranked pistol and rifle team, he found college difficult. After two years, he dropped out to become a barnstormer, performing daredevil aerobatics. In 1924, he enlisted in the Army Air Service Reserve, proving to be the best pilot in the class and earning a commission as a Lieutenant. He then became an airmail pilot, flying routes and training others.

In 1919, hotel owner Raymond Orteig had offered a \$25,000 prize to the first aviator to fly solo nonstop from New York to Paris. By 1927 it remained unclaimed, though there had been several failed (and fatal) attempts. Lindbergh was convinced that it could be done and he set about gaining financial backers and planning his attempt. On May 20, he left from New York City in the Spirit of St. Louis and when Lindbergh landed in Paris 33 1/2 hours later, he became the most celebrated man in the world. Stunned by his sudden fame, Lindbergh was honored with countless awards and celebrations in America and Europe. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor and the first Distinguished Flying Cross in American history. He was promoted to a Colonel in the Army Air Service, and Time magazine created its Man of the Year feature to honor him. The modest, shy young man now found that everywhere he went, he was swamped with admirers and reporters.

Lindbergh used his newfound status to promote aviation and be a goodwill ambassador for the United States. In 1929, he married Anne Morrow, daughter of an American diplomat. Teaching her how to fly, she accompanied him on journeys across the globe as his navigator. Together, they charted routes for airlines -- trips which took them to remote and unusual places. The Lindberghs made headlines daily and were constantly under siege by the press.

On March 1, 1932, the Lindberghs' 20-month-old baby was kidnapped. The media sensation surrounding the slightest clue or rumor made investigation difficult but eventually contact was made with the kidnapers and the Lindberghs delivered the \$50,000 ransom. The child was not returned and its body was soon found within a few miles of the Lindbergh estate, apparently having been killed accidentally during the kidnapping attempt.

Feeling more pressure from the media and fearing for the life of their second child, the Lindberghs moved to Europe. They visited Nazi Germany, where Hermann Goring presented Charles with a medal of honor and showed off Germany's advances in airplane design. Lindbergh delivered crucial information about Nazi air power to the US embassy, but his acceptance of the medal -- and his fascination with German technical prowess -- made many Americans uneasy. Returning to America in 1939, he warned the government of Germany's military power. His visits to England and France had convinced him that those powers would not be ready for a war with Germany, and neither would America. He joined America First, an isolationist movement, and spoke out against American involvement in the growing crisis in Europe. Many mistook his anti-war attitude as actual sympathy for the Nazi cause and he suddenly went from being a national hero to a villain.

When America was brought into the war on December 7, 1941, Lindbergh stopped his protests, determined to help his country in any way he could. That proved difficult when President Roosevelt prevented him from enlisting and kept aircraft manufacturers from hiring him. Finally, Ford Motor Company hired him as an advisor and in 1944 sent him to the Pacific to inspect their planes there. He developed techniques that extended the

crucial in the years before WWII.

Alternatively, if something else were to have gotten his interest as a young man besides aviation, his career could have been very different -- though perhaps just as successful. In our history, Lindbergh dabbled in just about everything and usually proved capable in whatever he attempted. Working with Dr. Alexis Carrel, he invented the first artificial heart in 1935, and his book *The Spirit of St. Louis* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1953. An alternate history could easily see Lindbergh becoming a famous writer, politician, or explorer.

Lucky Lindy and Flying Saucers

Lindbergh had a wide range of interests besides aviation, and liked to push the edge of science. He dabbled in mysticism to test its power, explored archeological sites in South America, and was an early supporter of rocketry. However, despite his interest in UFO phenomena, he claimed that he did not believe they were alien visitors. If there

range of fighters an extra 200 miles, and unofficially flew 50 combat missions.

After the war, he was able to withdraw from public life, being commissioned as a brigadier general and serving as a consultant for the Strategic Air Command. During the 1960s, he became a tireless promoter of the conservation movement. He also took an interest in primitive cultures and briefly lived with tribes in Africa and the Philippines. He died of cancer in 1974 and was buried on the Hawaiian island of Maui, where he had recently moved.

Encountered

Despite his fame, Lindbergh remains modest and approachable, even friendly. However, he rarely lets his feelings show other than giving a slight smile. At social functions, he will be polite but secretly uncomfortable and he tries to avoid the press whenever possible. He is straightforward and unapologetic. He will pursue anything that catches his interest, and heartily support what he feels is important.

Whether searching for previously-undiscovered Mayan ruins from the air, spending a few months living with Eskimos or islanders, or just touring around Europe, the globe-spanning Lucky Lindy could pop up literally anywhere.

Further Reading

- **Lindbergh** (Berkley Publishing Group, 1999). Bergh, A. Scott.
- **The Spirit of St. Louis**. Lindbergh, Charles.

was any hard evidence to the contrary, he once said, he would have been aware of it. An interesting statement, considering that he had personally arranged funding for scientist Robert Goddard to set up a research facility in Roswell, New Mexico.

Crime of the Century

Two years after the Lindbergh kidnapping, Bruno Hauptmann was arrested for the crime. The trial was highly sensationalized; there was a mountain of evidence against Hauptmann but it was mostly circumstantial and he never confessed, even after being found guilty. Many have since speculated that Hauptmann was innocent, or at least one member of a gang of kidnapers.

Though the motive for the crime seems to have been the ransom money, perhaps there was more behind it. The first-born child often has significance in mysticism and myth. Perhaps cultists (or, say, the Cabal) were actually behind the crime, believing the child of the world's most famous

aviator would be a powerful sacrifice. Even darker, in some myths, the first-born child is taken as payment for demonic favors. Perhaps Lindbergh's Paris flight and subsequent fame came with a dreadful price.

The Kobb Group

by Alice Turow

Edward was an early adopter of technology; he had insisted his wedding photographs be taken with Kodachrome. Color pictures -- true color, not the painted daguerreotypes that were so popular earlier -- were a rarity in 1937. Jessica loved those pictures. Unfortunately, the process was unstable prior to 1939.

Edward looked at the picture frame. It didn't contain a photo anymore, except by the most generous of definitions . . . just a white sheet with a hint of green in some places that was almost visible if you squinted and imagined. And remembered. Jessica died shortly after man walked on the moon. The frame sat to the left of his typewriter, in his windowed office.

Kelly entered his office, startling Edward out of his past. "Hate to disturb," she said, her face beaming with youthful energy, "but I just wanted to remind you that we'll need the Hamilton file closed before 5 tomorrow. Mr. Kobb has assured us all there would be dire consequences if it wasn't done."

*"Ah. Yes, I know, I know. Thanks, Kelly. I'll have it done soon." Kelly smiled, did a body-bobbing nod, and left. Edward looked at the Hamilton papers on his desk. What they referenced, what they represented, what they **meant** -- if anything -- completely eluded him. He knew what needed to be done, just not why. He ran his hand through his hair, still naturally brown after all this time, and sighed quietly.*

"You're lucky, Jessica," he said, addressing the frame in a quavering whisper. "You only faded away . . ."

* * *

The Kobb Group seems, by all outside appearances, to be a normal business. Its three-story building houses 87 employees (or possibly less, if there are recent departures), and it has been a part of the city landscape for as long as anyone can remember. Before 1937 it was known as the Kobb Foundation, the century before that as the Kobb-Westman Conglomerate, and the century before that as the Kobb & Westman Atlantic Trading House. The business has been wholly owned by the Kobb family for over a century at least, presumably when Westman was bought out.

The Kobb Group offers standard -- if uninspiring -- compensation. Its employees tend to be paid a modest salary . . . enough to ensure a middle class life. Health benefits are provided for the employees and their families, there is a "retirement" plan, and from their first day all workers get one week of vacation and one week of sick leave a year. But these benefits are flat; salaries keep up with inflation, but nothing more. No employees get more than their one week of vacation and one week of sick leave. And while those in higher levels of the company -- the managers and department heads -- *are* paid more for their efforts, it's not so much more that there is significant aspiration within the company for advancement. And they still aren't given any more vacation or sick leave.

The Kobb Group also has a peculiar secret. Its employees will remain at the age they were when they became employed by the company, for as long as they continue working there. Thus, its employees are effectively unaging -- for the small cost of eight hours a day, five days a week, fifty weeks a year. Forever.

This secret is not common knowledge; in fact, it isn't even spoken of by long-time employees. The job is monotonous enough that most employees leave within a few years, unaware of what has happened. For those who have been there long enough, it's simply presumed they will understand what is happening. Lunchtime conversations are generally veiled in phrases like, "We've been working together a long time," or "This job doesn't pay much, but there *are* other

benefits."

The Mechanics of Immortality

"Adam announced his retirement today; he's leaving in a week. He said he's been with the company too long. He says he's tired. On Tuesday we'll eat cake, solemnly. By Friday he will be dead."

--Journal entry from Kelly Gale from Tuesday May 4th, 1937.

Those who work for the Kobb Group are not truly immortal; they simply do not age while employed there. The moment they lose their job -- whether they quit or are fired -- whatever time they have had thwarted by working at the Kobb Group returns, aging them the full amount over the course of a week. Thus an employee who leaves after seventy years would age ten years a day for a full week. Of course, employees who worked there an exceptionally long time -- or those that were already older when they started -- may find the results fatal before the week is up. There are no other adverse physical effects of leaving the job. If, for some reason, the person goes back to work for the company, the lost years do not return.

There are also no other benefits of working at the Kobb Group. The job does not bestow health, nor grant any other powers or boons . . . although every once in a while someone brings in doughnuts on Mondays.

The Company

"Those without an eye to the past cannot hope to thrive in the future. To that end, the Kobb Group is dedicated to bringing its clients up-to-date and accurate information, analysis, and extrapolation. We carry out these goals with efficiency, confidentiality, and integrity. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow, the Kobb Group will be there for your needs."

--Excerpt from the Company Statement section of *Kobb Group Employee Handbook*

On the inside, the Kobb Group is an uninspiring company, to say the least. At a glance, it doesn't seem like its 87 employees actually *do* anything, beyond filling out and filing papers, sending faxes around the world, issuing memos to each other, and other bits of tedious office work. An in-depth investigation, however, reveals that the first glance is entirely accurate. The Kobb Group has more than enough clients to keep everyone busy, despite the fact that no one actually *recruits* new clients (unless Mr. Kobb does such himself directly, as some on the inside theorize). And what -- if anything -- the Kobb Group actually does for those clients is anyone's guess.

The entire organization seems to revolve around pointless paperwork; those who ask too many questions are given "evaluations," are saddled with even *worse* drudgery until they learn, or -- in extreme cases -- are fired.

The Kobb Group is divided into five sub-organizations: Information Analysis, Customer Relations, Data Processing, Financing, and Internal Affairs/Human Resources. Each of these subgroups has 16 employees plus one manager. Although it's difficult to say what (if anything) each group *does*, it's generally presumed that the "information, analysis, and extrapolation" of the Company Statement loosely correspond to Customer Relations, Information Analysis, and Data Processing. Customer Relations, contrary to its name, almost never deals with actual people; instead it's responsible for processing paperwork and data directly submitted by the clients (presumably). Financing seems to deal with both clients' and the Kobb Group's monetary matters . . . although both are equally inscrutable. Internal Affairs/Human Resources is perhaps the most lucid of the departments; they deal exclusively with the employees, internal correspondence and supplies, and bureaucracy of the business itself. Although many new to the company believe that IA/HR is the best section to work for -- since it's the only section that makes any *sense* -- longtime workers realize that this is not without its price; new employees often engage in politics to try to get those jobs, and Mr. Kobb seems to pay special attention to that department. And IA/HR usually has the unenviable task of firing employees . . . generally knowing full well the consequences.

The five managers of this department report directly to Mr. Kobb. Mr. Kobb (no first name known; if pressed for a "full name" he signs documents "Kobb VI") can override or modify any decisions of the department heads; he does

this often enough to make the managers nervous. He can also take an interest in the progress of specific projects, or the performance of specific employees. Mr. Kobb looks to be in his late 40s, and is generally affable . . . although his demeanor can change at a moment's notice. At those times he can be coldly cruel yet detached, and a shudder runs down everyone's back whenever he firmly tells someone to "clean out [his] desk. Now."

There is one other employee at the Kobb Group: Mr. Kobb's personal secretary Judith Iecur. (Heaven help anyone who mistakenly calls her Judy . . .) She has been here longer than *any* of the other 85 employees can remember; she can answer any question about the company without hesitation, and is aware of minutia regarding clients that no one else is. Young-looking -- in her late 20s, at most -- Ms. Iecur is constantly moderated and cool; she serves as the gateway to Mr. Kobb (who generally has time for all employees . . . provided it is important), and no piece of paper leaves Kobb's office without also having her initials. There are those who suspect -- very quietly and privately -- that she may be the *real* power behind the company. Or maybe she's something completely different . . .

Thus the company employs 85 people, plus Kobb and Iecur; there may be fewer employees if there have been recent departures, but there are never more. In fact, for as far back as IA/HR has records (and is willing to share them) the company has *always* had 87 total employees. Whether or not this is significant is a matter of debate.

The Kobb Group always seems to be behind the times technologically. In a modern setting they don't have *any* computers (although they have several fax machines); some desks have electric typewriters, but most have old manual ones. Those who have worked there a while remember how long it took to even get *those* in . . .

Employees are discouraged -- but not forbidden -- from bringing in their own technology. However, it *is* generally forbidden to store any company information on personally owned items (although some still do such); thus an employee could use a palm-held computer to store appointments or personal company data, but couldn't store client information therein. Some people bring in radios, a few people bring in tape players, and one new employee has brought in a CD player . . . which many others view with suspicion. There *is* a water cooler.

There is no security system in the building (which itself looks ancient), beyond old reliable deadbolts. If the building has ever been burglarized, no one has ever noticed or reported it.

Company Policies

The Kobb Group has a very strict stance regarding its time off. All vacation days must be scheduled ahead of time (although only a week's notice is required to use vacation time). "Sick leave" can be used for any purpose at all, without notice . . . but taking any more time off than the allotted week will result in immediate termination. This can make those unlucky enough to contract any serious illness *extremely* nervous. The company is willing to give an extended leave of absence for women expecting children, but the unaging properties of the Kobb Group treats this departure as unemployment; the results on both mother and child can be tragic. As a result, long-term female employees of the company tend to be *very* careful with their private relations; some have even forgone sex entirely, just to be safe.

There are no company-wide vacation days given; if an employee wants Christmas off, he can use one of his five days. There are no exceptions. And Mr. Kobb and Ms. Iecur *never* take a day off. Employees must all work 8:00 AM through 5:00 PM, with an hour-long lunch to be taken when they desire (although that time cannot be used to arrive late or leave early). Tardiness will count towards the employee's sick leave. Neither vacation or sick leave may be accrued from year to year; any time not used is lost (although the employee *does* get monetary compensation for those days). Beyond these rules, and presuming the company doesn't break any laws or do anything egregious, the company is surprisingly tolerant. Employees may talk or associate with each other on company time, assuming they get their (not insignificant) work done. To that end, employees will often celebrate each others' birthdays (itself an ironic ritual for those who work there) on company time, tell jokes, and do any of the myriad of little defiancees that compromise an office. Provided the employee does his job, he's assured a job for life . . . with all that entails.

Given the oddities of working at the Kobb Group, they have surprisingly few problems with the government. Laws that their policies would seem to break elsewhere -- most having to do with vacation and sick leave -- are not prosecuted.

In fact, in-depth investigation will show that there are loopholes, provisions, and exceptions, seemingly tailored *just* for this one company. Likewise the employees will never be hassled by any government agency for being of an unnatural age; the Department of Motor Vehicles will blindly nod and give the license to the person whose birthyear is listed as 1911.

The Hidden Rules

Although the company doesn't have many rules, the *employees* have adopted fairly intricate rules of conduct.

As previously mentioned, the unaging effects of the company are not mentioned. If an employee *does* inquire too much into the phenomenon, he will be quietly told by another worker that no one talks about such things.

Intercompany romances are not forbidden, but they are strongly discouraged by the employees; knowing that you may need to work in the same office with an ex-relation for the rest of time will do much to discourage such affairs.

The company is not discussed outside the company. Secretly the employees fear that -- should the outside world learn of the Kobb Group's unaging properties -- there would either be a rush of prospective employees, an in-depth investigation into *why* the company has this effect, or something worse. The longest-lived of the workers fear that anything which upsets the balance may cause the company to close down, or keep them away from work for more than a week . . . either of which could be fatal.

In fact, anything that draws undue attention to the company is greatly discouraged. This includes the obvious, like talking to a reporter about the company, but also the not-so-obvious, like maintaining relations too long. Those who work for the Kobb Group for many years find themselves needing to sever ties with family and long-time friends, lest they become too suspicious. The only exception to this rule goes towards spouses, provided they can be sworn to secrecy. Of course, such marriages often have other strains put on them . . .

Nepotism is forbidden. In fact, relatives and friends are strongly discouraged from even applying for work at the office; the potential for problems is considerable if the only thing keeping a loved one from getting a job is getting someone else fired.

If an employee breaks any of these rules, the other employees generally do their best to make the offending person's life miserable. Files will take forever to get found or copied, parking spaces will be filled with nails, The person then usually has three options: reform (at which point the torment normally stops), endure the misery (which, as far as anyone knows, could last for all eternity), or quit (with the resultant consequences).

As a rule, no one tends to break these rules *after* they leave the company either. Those who would, say, threaten to report what they know to the press tend to be persuaded not to. In extreme cases they may disappear entirely.

The Psychology of Working at the Kobb Group

The mindset of those who work at the Kobb Group is varied, and employees' reactions can depend on their own mindsets, how long they've been working, and what their life outside the company is.

Some employees can't deal with the monotony of the job, and the relative scarcity of perks. Those workers tend to leave quickly, before they even learn the *real* benefit of working there.

Some people at the company see the incredible advantages the employment offers. After all, millions of people spend their lives working at places they hate; at least this company gives the possibility of longevity. One employee wrote a Pulitzer Prize-winning book pseudonymously over the course of forty years. Another has devoted his time to recording as much lore as possible about European history. And one employee has been working for over a century, taking meticulous notes, analyzing scraps of information, and doing research, trying to discern what's *really* going on at the Kobb offices . . .

And some people at the office -- perhaps the majority -- view their employment entirely neutrally; they don't even think about it, really; they put their time in, go home, watch television until they fall asleep, and go to work the next day. These people may find it hard to even realize how long they've been working there. Those with more lucid (or paranoid) minds at the company wonder if their zombie-like state is entirely their own fault.

After a while, many employees find themselves in a quandary. They realize they hate working for the company and want to leave, but are afraid. After all, going from 26 to 66 in a week is too much for most people. Unfortunately, that decision doesn't get any easier; eventually, it becomes a choice of living in a situation they hate, or certain death.

Using the Kobb Group in a Campaign

The Kobb Group is open-ended enough that a GM has many options for using it.

Here are some possibilities.

- **Weird Immortality.** Vampires are lucky; drinking blood only takes a few minutes a day, not 2000 hours a year. But vampires also don't tend to hire new recruits via want ads. If a GM or player is looking for an alternative for any of the "classic" immortality hooks, working for the Kobb Group provides such a means. And, given the restrictions of working there, in many systems the disadvantages of working there will partially or entirely offset the advantage of being unaging.
- **The Secret.** What is happening at the Kobb Group could be the focus of an adventure, a series, or an entire campaign. It may be part of an evil plot, an unusual coincidence, or something entirely alien. In *In Nomine*, for example, it may be a Demon Prince's means of extracting Essence out of humans, or some more grandiose plot. (Malphas or Kronos would be logical choices.) In *Call of Cthulhu* the company may be part of an *incredibly* slow ritual, whose participants are unknowing, and the final outcome of which would be suitably . . . interesting.
- **An Onion's Layer.** Given the nature of the company, it should be easy to include as an element for many kinds of plots. The Kobb Group might make a mysterious red herring for another plot (if, say, an employee happens to be involved with some *other* mysterious force). Or maybe the plot is tied mysteriously to Westman, whose name used to adorn the company . . .
- **An Alternate Prison.** If all the heroes of a group start as employees of the company, the campaign can begin with them trying to either determine the secret, using their agelessness for their own benefit, or working up the nerve to quit. In this case, the "actual" age of the heroes should be determined as advantages or disadvantages; it's not as much a risk for an employee who has been working there for two years, versus one who's been there a century. (On the other hand, one who's only been there two years may not know what he threatens to lose if he quits . . .)
- **McGuffin of Lore.** The Kobb Group can hold any kind of plot device for a campaign. It may employ someone who has accumulated information over a long period of time, or it may contain an item that has been lost (or hidden) for centuries. And once they interact and investigate, they may well be drawn into the company's own plots.

Alternatives

The Kobb Group can be moved into many other genres or eras without much difficulty; the basic premise is fairly straightforward. Perhaps the only thing to remember is that the more common unaging is, the less special the company is. If a cyberpunk setting has eugenics drugs, for example, then the Kobb Group's secret isn't as interesting (although it might be a curious alternative for those who are unable to afford it).

Lighter Options

If you want the Kobb Group to be lighter in tone, all you need to do is change the nature of the company. Perhaps the company's employees are really helping to sort out Marc's finances in an *In Nomine* campaign. Perhaps they are responsible for keeping the paperwork of Project Utopia's altruistic deeds in order in an *Aberrant* game. Perhaps

they're helping to compile Santa's Naughty/Nice list. Regardless, actually completing a goal that has some worth does a lot to shave the sinister edge off the company.

Likewise, reducing the side effects of quitting also lightens the tone. Perhaps any years gained by being employed there *don't* come back to haunt the worker. Perhaps they can get more vacation time, or more flexible hours. (The latter can be important for crafting adventuring possibilities if the heroes are employees of the company.) Perhaps working there makes the employee truly *immortal*; that would open up all sorts of possibilities (as well as new dilemmas).

Darker Options

Making the Kobb Group darker in tone is challenging; if the company is *too* demonic, then it's difficult to justify why people work there. Some possibilities include:

- Those who work there are unaging. Those who leave, die. (Whether death appears natural or gruesome is the GM's discretion.)
- The longer employees work there, the more they realize they are working for some demonic, alien, or otherwise sinister force. Employees are then faced with the horror of knowing they work for evil, yet knowing that they cannot leave.
- Employees *can* advance in the company. There are additional benefits for higher-level workers, and managers wield new advantages and powers (perhaps some mundane, some wondrous). This would probably cause cutthroat intercompany fighting; if employees have reason to work harder, backstab, or scheme, they very well might. And if they *don't*, someone may be planning to backstab or scheme against them . . .

* * *

"Mr. Kobb?"

"Yes, Edward? Er, it's all right, Judith . . . I can handle this."

Ms. Iecur left the room as Edward approached the desk. "Today I have written my one millionth zero, since I started counting 50 years ago. I didn't count before then, but 50 years ago the president was shot. 50 years ago my life began losing meaning; six years later killed the meaning that was left."

"What are you trying to say?" asked Mr. Kobb; there almost seemed to be a pang of emotion in his voice. Anticipation? Nervousness? Excitement? Edward couldn't tell.

"What I'm trying to say, sir, is that I quit. I've given you a million zeroes, and I quit."

"I see." Mr. Kobb offered him a cigar -- which he refused -- then lit up one himself. "You do realize what that means, then . . . don't you, Edward?"

"Yes, sir, I do; that's why I'm quitting."

Mr. Kobb nodded and shook Edward's hand firmly. Edward then turned around and walked out the office. He didn't look back.

Pyramid Review

Mage Knight Dungeons

Published by [WizKids](#)

Written by Michael Mulvihill, Kevin Barrett, Ian Reddit, Matt Robinson, and Jordan Weisman

Starter Set: \$19.95

Booster Set: \$6.95

Dungeons Builder Kit: \$14.95

Miniature Wargames figures and the term "collectible" would appear to be quite incompatible, but the publisher, WizKids have certainly proved that this is not the case. Their collectible miniatures wargame, *Mage Knight: Rebellion*, has been something of a hit, with both clever design and marketing. The marketing in that the game was sold like a collectible card game -- you bought an \$18 starter set and then added as many \$6.50 booster sets as you wished. Once you got the boxes open you found the rules and everything you needed to play, but most especially the miniatures. These were done in tough plastic and came pre-painted, so that there was none of the time-consuming preparation of painting and assembly required with more traditional metal miniatures. True, the paint jobs were rather rough in quality, but it still meant that when you got your small army on the table, you had an instantly attractive and durable product before you. Of course, there was nothing to stop you repainting your *Mage Knight* miniatures.

Mage Knight: Rebellion also cut down on the record keeping and paperwork of traditional wargaming through innovative design. The base of each figure contained a combat dial, which combined with the rest of the information upon the base, kept track of a miniature's status as a battle progressed. Simply, as each figure or warrior took damage, this dial was turned clockwise to reflect its reduced status and effectiveness.

Mage Knight: Rebellion concentrated upon war between eight different factions, and following in the pattern set by collectible card games, WizKids brought out two expansion sets, *Lancers* and *Whirlwind*. Now they are taking the *Mage Knight* concept in a slightly different direction . . . underground, with *Mage Knight Dungeons*. As the title suggests, this is a game of delving into and raiding below ground facilities in the well trodden mould of classic games such as TSR's *Dungeon!*, Games Workshop's *DungeonQuest*, plus their *Hero Quest* and *Warhammer Quest*, as well as Ariel's ancient *Sorcerer's Cave* and SPI's *Deathmaze*.

Inside a Starter Set are eight figures in roughly 30mm scale -- two *Hero Warriors* and six "enemy" Mage Spawn, two Treasure Chests that can open and close, a thirty by twenty-inch double-sided paper Dungeon Map (marked in one-and-a-half inch squares), a fold out Special Abilities card, a 24-page full-color rulebook, a handful of tokens and markers, plus a pair of ordinary six-sided dice. If I have a complaint about the contents of both the Starter and Booster Sets, it is that the little individual plastic trays that the figures come in are just too flimsy for long-term use. Even normal handling caused splitting and really, all of these components could have been packaged into a single, sturdier tray. Plus it would make getting the game out for a session (and putting it away afterwards) much, much easier.

The selection in my *Starter Set* included the six *Mage Spawn*: one Gnoll Hunter, a Gnoll Fletcher, two Skeleton Archers, one Armored Skeleton, one Potbellied Gremlin, and the two Hero Warriors, Lord Oren and Mage-King Alment Lan, plus the two treasure chests. As with other *Mage Knight* figures, the base of each is marked with the warrior's name, their point value for when you want to include it in an army, a symbol indicating the faction they belong to, their front and rear arcs, and their collector's number. For those that do like to collect, there are some

Pyramid Review: Mage Knight Dungeons



hundred figures in the *Mage Knight Dungeon* basic series, including some thirty-two Hero Warriors, plus thirty-two treasure chests. WizKids claim that the painting on these figures is much improved, and this is certainly the case with the Mage Spawn figures, which are far better painted than the Hero Warriors.

The combat dial on the base indicates a figure's values for speed, attack, defense, range and number of any distance attacks. If any of these are marked with a colored spot or square, it indicates a special ability associated with that value. For example, Lord Oren has two special abilities at first level -- a Sweep Special Attack Ability that allows him all opponents in his front arc and the Battle Armour Defence Special Ability, which provides extra defence against ranged attacks. At higher levels, Lord Oren gains more abilities such as Command and Forced March, but can lose his standard abilities if damaged in combat. Abilities can be supplanted by those taken from Treasure Chests, but in general, Hero Warriors have more special abilities than figures in Mage Knight Rebellion. The other difference is level. Yes, "level," as the Hero Warriors in *Mage Knight Dungeons* can earn experience and gain levels. They start at first and can rise as high as fifth level, and on the underside of a Hero Warrior's base is a sticker showing their point value for each level. The treasure chests consist of two parts: a trap in the lid and the treasure located in the base. There is a small dial in both the lid and the base, so that treasure and trap can be randomly determined for each game.

Upon pulling everything out of the *Starter Set*, the game is designed so that it can be played almost immediately in a two-player basic version called a "Lone Wolf Dungeon Crawl." I say "almost immediately" because the rules, while simple enough, are not quite written in a step-by-step manner, so that you can play as you learn. That said, reading them takes only a matter of ten minutes or so.

The objective in both the basic and advanced games is for a Hero Warrior to enter and leave the dungeon by their designated entrance and exit, having opened and taken the contents of a Treasure Chest. Along the way, they will face Mage Spawn and possibly their opposing player's Hero Warrior, but if successful will gain experience and possibly new special abilities.

Set up is quick and simple -- laying down the dungeon map, designating entrances and exits, and placing both the Treasure Chests and the wandering monster tokens that represent the Mage Spawn until they are encountered. The Mage Spawn figures are kept aside in their own pool until needed. During a game, players can activate two figures per turn; one of these should be their Hero Warrior and the other a wandering monster counter, or a Mage Spawn figure in play. Even after a Hero Warrior has died or left the dungeon, its player continues to move whatever monsters are still in play until the opposing Hero Warrior either leaves or dies. Once a wandering monster counter meets a Hero Warrior, it is flipped over and the table on the back is rolled on to determine the point value of the monsters pulled into play from the Mage Spawn pool. Roll high enough and this can bring several Mage Spawn into play! Combat invariably ensues and damage from both ranged and melee attacks is inflicted upon each figure by clicking their combat dial down.

Getting to a Treasure Chest is half the fun, as a Hero Warrior has to deal with the trap in its lid before they can open the contents, which itself can also be a trap! A trap can be disarmed either quickly or slowly, which gives a bonus to the disarm roll. If failed, a trap can inflict damage upon just the Hero Warrior trying to disarm it or upon all of those around the chest or the whole room . . . and that includes any Mage Spawn that springing the trap might have summoned! The treasures are items that give temporary bonuses to a Hero or even a special ability. Heroes can carry no more than two treasures. Chests also contain gold and the player who carries the most gold out of the dungeon will be the winner.

For every action -- springing or disarming a trap, killing Mage Spawn or a Hero -- experience points are earned. For each fifty so gained, a Hero goes up a level. This automatically improves their abilities and also fully heals them! This can be a godsend when facing a lot of Mage Spawn. Players need to keep a running score of their experience, as level gains take place immediately upon earning enough points from completing an action. This is the only record keeping within the game.

Play is quick and involving, and a Lone Wolf Dungeon Crawl should take no more than an hour the first time round. With practise, such a game should be a lot quicker. Although only a two-player game, more can be accommodated through the purchase of a *Booster Kit* for each new player. These contain one random Hero Warrior, one "rare" Mage

Spawn, two common Mage Spawn, and one random Treasure chest. Beyond this there are the Advanced Rules, which come into their own with the *Dungeons Builder Kit*. This contains four seven-and-a-half inch square double-sided dungeon tiles, two five by seven-and-a-half inch square double-sided dungeon tiles, six double-sided terrain markers, ten markers, and four plastic painted doors that actually open and close! There are three types of the *Dungeons Builder Kit*.

There is relatively little difference between the Basic and Advanced Rules, but instead of using the *Starter Set*'s Dungeon Map, players take turns to lay down the dungeon tiles and modify them with the terrain markers, which include stairs, which enable dungeons to be built with multiple levels and teleport pads. The Advanced Rules discuss using multi-hero teams and how to use *Mage Knight: Rebellion* figures in *Mage Knight Dungeons*. Essentially, *Rebellion* figures can be added to the *Mage Spawn* pool, and those used as Heroes can only be fully healed rather than gain levels as they acquire enough experience points. Also the only multi-dial figures that can be used in *Mage Knight Dungeons* are, naturally enough, dragons! Finally, where unit formation and movement is important in *Rebellion*, it is not here.

Like any collectible game, *Mage Knight Dungeons* can get expensive quite quickly, but only if you want to add all of the options of the *Dungeons Builder Kits* to your games. For a two-player game, the *Starter Set* is relatively inexpensive and if a group shares the costs, adding more players is not costly either. If you are prepared to do so, a lot of fun can be had from *Mage Knight Dungeons*, and with a few Booster Kits, simple scenarios can be created and a little roleplaying thrown into this underground skirmish game. Further, with these rules, you could use other floor plans of a similar scale, such as the *Cardboard Heroes Dungeon Floors* or other titles in the *Floor Plan* series from Steve Jackson Games -- *Floor Plan 1: Haunted House* springs to mind here.

Mage Knight Dungeons has the advantage of simple rules and great visual appeal, and with a little added roleplaying, could be used to introduce new players to the hobby. The internal packing is a little flimsy, but otherwise, this is a fun game that is easy to get out and play, to which you can add as much or as little as you want.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Beyond the Veil (for d20)

Published by [Atlas Games](#) (Penumbra)

Written by Monte Cook

48 b & w pages; \$9.95

[SPOILER ALERT]

Beyond The Veil is something that not enough d20 publishers are making: A quality upper range module suitable for 9th level characters and higher. Within these pages, the party will pit their wits against an undead dragon whose powers were never tested when at their peak. Instead, slain by treacherous monks, the dragon's ghost is awakened years later and its original boast, that it could never be defeated in its lair, is the only way to lay it to rest.

The module starts off with a bit of background, an adventure synopsis, and three ideas on how to get the characters started in the module. Starting off in the village of Iversham, the party will see evidence of the black dragon Storamere's power. There are several bits of information that the party can gather through the villages as well as some minor magics like potions and scrolls. Once the party begins looking through the swamp, they get to encounter the dragon first-hand. At this point, even if the players beat the undead beast, it matters little since its ghostly nature prevents it from resting in peace . . . the party may learn this lesson the hard way if the GM wishes to pound them a bit with a rejuvenated undead dragon!

Once the party realizes that they cannot simply kill the beast, they have to seek out the monks who originally killed it to find out how to lay the beast to rest permanently. The monks are two interesting characters that the players may not have long to learn about as one of Storamere's children, a half-dragon half-stone giant attacks. One of the nice things here is that even if the party fails to save the monks, they can still gain the information they need to progress in the adventure without being railroaded. It just takes longer.

The party finds a broken arch bridge . . . but this is only an illusion. The other half of the bridge isn't in this world but rather, "beyond the veil." A clever play on words the references the title just as much as the dragon's undead state does. Another nice thing about this adventure is that it has some red herrings that anxious players may stumble upon and provide the GM with even more hours of amusement as they keep wondering how to put the dragon to rest.

Assuming that the players finally discover the veil, the party has to battle Storamere in his palace, a place where all of the walls are acid. Since the dragon is immune to such damage, this makes the battle an extremely dangerous one that stupid players will quickly perish in. Worse still, the party must do battle not only with the dragon, but more of his children in the forms of skilled half-dragon half-drow fighters, a half-dragon half-manticore, a half-dragon half-giant-constrictor-snake, and several other interesting combinations of dragon and monster until they confront the monstrous undead dragon at the heart of his acidic lair for a climactic battle.

Like most Atlas *d20* products, *Beyond the Veil* one has a fair number of crunchy bits. All of the half-dragons showcase how to add a template to a standard creature to create some truly unique encounters. In addition to the half-dragon template use, there is a new feat, Sundering (which adds a bonus to strength when using the Sunder feat), a new magic item (the Amulet of Dragon Will), a new weapon (the Dragon Dagger), several new potions, and a new spell (Wall of Will -- a high level arcane spell that prevents passage). To cap it all off, there is a new template, the Dragon Bloodspawn, which is a quarter-dragon.

One of the only obvious failings of this module is there isn't enough information on how to scale it for higher or lower



level characters. Still, one of the best things about the module is the potential for other adventures. While not more than a paragraph, Monte suggests adding further "half-bridges" or other veils that can allow the GM to finally put that new *Manual of the Planes* to use. Of course, the GM could always have Storamere's father Leashadram return, quoting the *Godfather*, "Look how they butchered my boy."

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Appendix A is an experience chart for 9th level characters. One of the nice things is that it shows how experience values can be modified or awarded. Unfortunately, it's only for 9th level characters. Appendix B is the map of Storamere's Palace. An index with a quick listing for monsters, NPCs, spells, and other goodies makes finding most things a snap.

While the spacing is a little generous for me, the fact that this module is the same price as a 32 page Wizards of the Coast adventure more than make up for it. The only thing that would've made it better would be using the interior cover pages for stuff like the table of contents and the OGL. The art is a little darker in the module than in most Atlas ones, perhaps a change of the ink tone color, but is still high quality. Statistical text, such as monster and NPC stats, are placed when the creature is first encountered, unlike some other modules where all such stats are collected in an appendix.

The book follows the standard two columns of text. Open Game Content is identified by being boxed in gray. For There isn't really a lot of read-aloud text (for those who like that), and when there is, it isn't really boxed or separated so the GM must read the adventure all the way through at least once to insure that the traps and other hidden goodies aren't given away by reading everything aloud. Advertising, another pet peeve of mine, is also kept to a minimum with less than half a page going to the *En Route* sourcebook.

Beyond the Veil is a challenging module for 9th level characters that will add a lot to the campaign months after the adventure is finished.

--Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Review

Adrift in the River of Dream (for Tribe 8)

Published by [Dream Pod 9](#)

Written by **Bradley Robins, Lisa A. Nichols, & Joshua Bishop-Roby**

\$22.95; 144 pages

For me, the first time I read *Tribe 8* was like the first time I fell in love. I got this goofy look on my face, we spent all our time together, and we stayed up real late learning about each other. The main difference is Tribe 8 didn't leave me to get married to a sailor.

My greatest reaction to *Tribe 8* was a desire for more knowledge. "I want to know more," I said, "about the Fatimas" . . . and then they gave me the Word books. "I want to know more," I said, "about the Z'Bri" . . . and *Horrors of the Z'Bri* soon found its way to publication. "I want to know more about Synthesis and Dreaming," I said.

So now, they've given me *Adrift on the River of Dream*. Very, very cool.

The River of Dream, for those of you who don't play *Tribe 8*, is fairly similar to that Billy Joel song (since, of course, we can only assume that everyone who doesn't play *Tribe 8* is a Billy Joel fan). It is where the lands of spirit and matter meet, where Dreamers travel when they sleep. It's the source of Synthesis (the "powers" of *Tribe 8* characters). It's where metaphor and prophecy become real.

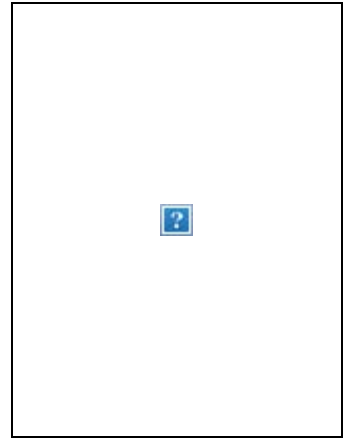
And it's very ambiguous. If you think *Mage* has a tendency to be vague and open to deliberation by players & GMs, you've never seen Synthesis. The problem is that there are very few rules for it. Synthesis is covered in about fifteen pages or so. It's very straightforward and easy to handle. "I don't need straightforward and simple!" I say. "I like *Champions*, for the love of Elvis! I enjoy reading the *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition* rulebook!

The shockingly low page count for Synthesis rules both confused and frightened me. It was always the one thing that kept me from playing or running *Tribe 8*. I never felt as if I could really grasp the Synthesis system properly. *Adrift on the River of Dream* doesn't totally remove the apprehension, but it helps dampen it a lot . . . enough that I think I've got the hang of this thing now.

The book follows the current literary method of game supplement design; it opens with game fiction, and concludes with crunchy bits. One difference is that the game fiction is a single unified story that takes up the first half of the book. The intro is the account of a circle (*Tribe 8* talk for a party) that is seeking to understand how the River of Dream flows. They start out as a trio of young tribals until their investigations begin to scare those in power. Instead of being executed, they're maimed and exiled.

This is the start of pretty much all *Tribe 8* games (well, the exile part, anyway). They begin to lose themselves in the sea of human detritus that is Hom (the island the 8th tribe call home). They regain their drive to complete their quest, and gain a fourth member of their circle. From there, the story gains momentum, taking them across Vimary to the land of the keepers, out to the outlands, where they encounter a tribe of Squats, and eventually taking them physically into the River. The characters are statted out in sidebars as they progress along their quest.

The story was thankfully engaging. The only other sourcebook that took a gamble such as this and used half its space for a fiction piece was the first edition *Shadowrun Virtual Realities* book. Of course, the similarities go deeper than



that; both of them are set in strange realms open only to those who are properly trained, and in both of them I liked the fiction more than the rules.

River's rule bits are by no means bad. But they come across as too dry in the aftermath of the preceding story. Some bits read poorly, and some bits are jarringly anachronistic. For example, there's a Synthesis Aspect called Habeas Corpus, used by a secret society to dig up evidence. It jars that in a post-apocalyptic society where mispronounced and half understood terms are clumsily integrated into the common vernacular there would be a complete Latin phrase being used.

Aside from a few small quibbles, the book does serve to expand on the use of the River of Dreams and Synthesis in *Tribe 8*. The legend described in the opening sequence expands the place of the River in *Tribe 8*'s cosmology; the stakes in the game have suddenly risen significantly. The framing legend would work wonderfully to help launch PCs on quests of their own, and would be a good springboard for quests that can be both personal and epic in scope.

I can see some quibbles from the *Tribe 8* fanbase (they're gamers, after all) at the game shifting from a high style Spirit-Punk game to something like what it will likely become in the wake of *River*. And, of course, anyone who hates Metaplots will find it a personal affront. But it's good to see them taking such a dramatically different tack with *Tribe 8*. And the book's ideas would be fairly easy to port to any low fantasy game or occult conspiracy game. It's a good value, being a good read and a good sourcebook.

--Justin Mohareb

Black Box Down

"Hey, what's that?"

'Arc light. B-52 strike.'

'Every time I hear that, something terrible happens.'"

-- Chef and Willard, *Apocalypse Now*

World War Two is officially gaming material now. It was the Good War, with moral clarity on all sides, and plenty of Spielbergian footage of scrappy heroes giving it up with gusto. Which leaves Vietnam as the Suppressed War, a war seemingly designed for Secret History, for Conspiracy, and for the Horror . . . the Horror. With clarity the first casualty of the murk of Indochina, we begin, then, with a single scene -- a B-52 resting, seemingly unharmed, in the middle of the jungle. Inside it, of course, we'll find all the murk, and horror, we need to go in country.

"When we got there, what we found was pretty bizarre. First of all the aircraft was fully intact. It had not crashed. It looked like a great big hand had grabbed it and just set it down in the jungle. There was no crash trail or anything."

-- testimony of William S. English (1992)

The central core of Bill English's story is so perfect that, like a soap bubble, one hesitates to touch it for fear that it will disintegrate. English, he claims, was attached to a specialized unit of American Green Berets in Vietnam. "In April or May of 1970," he and his team went to recover the survivors from a B-52 Stratofortress bomber that had crashed somewhere in Laos. The bomber, however, had not crashed, but had somehow been landed intact in the jungle. The hatches were still intact, and English's crew had to blow them open. Even stranger, the crew were still strapped in, but had been horribly mutilated -- although the interior of the bomber was remarkably unbloodied. English and his men took pictures of the mutilations, grabbed the dog tags, maps, and "everything else we needed to" (gun camera films, most likely), blew up the plane, and returned to Saigon.

Later, as a civilian analyst working for the DIA (or, possibly, the NSA) at RAF Chicksands air base in England, he saw his own photographs in a packet labeled "Grudge/Blue Book 13." This legendary report remains the only one never released to the public by the Air Force -- the Air Force claims it doesn't exist, having skipped "unlucky" 13 in the series. When, based on his knowledge of the photos' authenticity, he approved the packet as genuine, he was summarily fired, deported, and then hounded into hiding by the authorities. Attempting to clear his name, he tried to dig up a crashed UFO on the grounds of White Sands AFB, but his associates were killed by security helicopters. The whereabouts of Grudge 13, the nature of the unknown force that grounded a B-52, and the role of the NSA in evaluating UFO reports remain enigmatic shadows around the stark image of a close encounter in the Vietnam War.

"Before we go any further, let me tell you, I have over the years publicly acknowledged that the material that I viewed could very well have been misinformation. I've never denied that possibility."

-- testimony of William S. English (1992)

Well-respected UFOlogist Peter Brookesmith investigated English's story and discovered any number of problems with it. First, every B-52 ever made can be easily traced by serial number and tail number; no B-52 crashed under any circumstances between July 1969 and July 1972. Second, the Green Berets were not tasked for air crew recovery; the Air Force either used its own 3rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group or, in inaccessible locations, tasked MACV/SOG's SOG-80 "Recovery Studies Division." (A division, in any event, that English doesn't claim to have belonged to.) English does claim to have been part of Operation Phoenix, but their job was infiltration and assassination, not UFO crash investigations. And, needless to say, none of his story about White Sands checks out at all. On the other hand, he seems credibly informed about Chicksands, and Brookesmith concludes that he got fired from the American intelligence services there for mistaking a disinformation op for a real dispatch, and confabulated the rest to delight the days of people like Peter Brookesmith, and me, and you.

"As a specialized aspect of its overall materiel exploitation program, Headquarters USAF has established Project Moon Dust to locate, recover, and deliver descended foreign space vehicles."

-- Col. Betz, U.S.A.F. memo, Nov 13 1961

Of course, jurisdictional issues may not be the insuperable obstacle that Brookesmith believes they are. Project Moon Dust began in 1953 (or 1957, depending on which Air Force official you believe) as part of the Air Force's crash recovery teams, based out of Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Its job, officially, was to identify, track, and recover space crash debris, specifically foreign space debris. (Operation Blue Fly was the specific group within Moon Dust tasked with recovery missions.) A later Department of State communique clarified Moon Dust's mission: "the examination of non-US space objects or objects of unknown origin." At least two Moon Dust missions are public knowledge: a recovery in Nepal in 1968, and one in the Sudan in 1967. (Rumor also puts Moon Dust operations in Chad, Botswana, Bolivia, and several domestic crash sites.) At some point, at least according to indefatigable UFO Freedom-of-Information gadfly Clifford Stone, Project Moon Dust has been put under the Department of State rather than military command per se. Moon Dust may now have its own teams of paramilitary commandos, much as the CIA does for use in tumultuous ground situations. And it may have "borrowed" Green Berets for its own use in 1970, especially if its primary team was off somewhere else at the time.

"It was while there that I discovered that there was a tremendous amount of UFO and alien activity in Vietnam. It was always reported in official messages as 'enemy helicopters.' Now any of you who know anything about the Vietnam war know that the North Vietnamese did not have any helicopters, especially after our first couple of air raids into North Vietnam. Even if they had they would not have been so foolish as to bring them over the DMZ because that would have insured their demise. Our troops were fired on occasionally by these 'enemy helicopters,' enemy troops were fired on occasionally by these 'enemy helicopters,' and occasionally people would disappear. And on one instance that I know for sure at least one entire village disappeared one night due to alien activity." -- William Cooper, "UFO Cover-Up: Alien Nation or Conspiracy Theory?"

Certainly there were plenty of UFO incidents in Vietnam for Blue Book, or Moon Dust, or anyone, to investigate. In June 1966, a UFO blacked out the power at the army base at Nha Trang; a bat-winged "bird woman" (perhaps a [Spring-Heeled Jill](#)?) appeared to U.S. Marine Earl Morrison near Da Nang in the summer of 1969. Two separate reports exist of a spherical UFO piloted by Greys landing near Tonle Sap, Cambodia; at least once (in September, 1971), U.S. forces reportedly engaged them in combat. The region is even more famous for its USOs, Unidentified Submarine Objects. As early as June of 1909, a cigar-shaped USO flew over Dong Hoi and submerged off the coast. Two underwater "wheels of light" appeared in the South China Sea in 1891 and 1910; another two appeared in the Gulf of Siam in 1962 (to the *S.S. Telemachus*) and 1970 (to the U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Mellon*). Did the massive U.S. deployment to Southeast Asia serve to screen (or even to cover up, or better yet to justify) a reconnaissance-in-force against Sub-Oceanic Aliens, or against the remnants of the Lost Continent of Mu?

"You came up my river -- in that small boat. So simple. I always thought the final justice would come from the sky, like we did."

-- Col. Kurtz, *Apocalypse Now* (early draft screenplay)

Around the central core of "UFO operations in Vietnam" much can be spun. Whether the player characters are Moon Dust special ops, black ops fighting a long-term battle against the denizens of Vietnam's "lost world" of dinosaurs and Reptoids, VC guerrillas battling any number of indistinguishable "aliens from the sky", or even Zeta Reticulan grunts stuck "in country", the potential is there for darkness, confusion, and terror. **GURPS Atlantis** GMs can pit their gill-men and sentient octopoids against Navy SEALs; **GURPS Atomic Horror** GMs can send their MJ-12 agents to salvage the intergalactic inertial trackers from Angkor Wat before the war spreads to Cambodia. Any number of mysteries, from the aerial predators like the [Rods](#) to the vegetable hallucinocthones from [Mandrake](#) Country, can lurk underneath the canopy and behind the scrim of official prevarication. The struggle is there, the jungle is dark, and the aliens are waiting. Move in.

The Romantic View . . . By The Book

I have a confession to make, and it's one that may well alienate me from a bunch of our readers . . . but frankly that's never stopped me in the past, so what the heck.

I don't really read many books.

Now, by books I mean "novels." I tend to constantly be reading factoid books, logic and puzzle books, graphic novels, and even the occasional short story collection . . . not to mention the moon-sized mass of roleplaying books circulating around my apartment.

But I tend to read very few novels.

I generally justified this by saying I didn't have time, and to a certain extent that's true; I've almost always had at least one job since I was 15 (and frequently two), not to mention school and whatever else would drain my time. But I've come to realize that this is an excuse more than a reason.

(There's also another reason . . . but I think that's another column idea at some point.)

No, in reality the reason I don't read many novels is because, at their core, I don't trust them.

By this I mean that the potential for disappointment versus the time invested is too great for me. I can read a comic or a short story in 15 minutes. I can watch a television drama in an hour. I can watch a movie or read most graphic novels in two to three hours. And if any of these are truly lousy . . . well, then I've only lost at most three hours of my life.

But a novel? A novel represents a serious investment of time . . . generally a week or so at least (depending on how much free time I have to invest each day). And if at the end of that week I'm not satisfied with the experience, I tend to be *really* ticked off. Too often I've started a book, enjoyed the beginning, hit a stumbling block of some sort slogging through the middle, and limped to the end, hoping that the ending would either have a payoff or at least resolve the problems and issues introduced earlier. Or else I've just been profoundly disappointed by the ending itself. And I find myself thinking, "What the heck did I waste my time with that for?!? I want that week of my life back!"

(The problem has been even worse in the past couple of decades, with the increase in both the size and magnitude of recent offerings . . . especially in the Fantasy/Science Fiction realm. I've often had a book recommended to me and I've gone to check it out, only to learn that it's the first book in a 40-book series, each one the size of the Greater Atlanta Telephone Directory. Maybe it was a mistake growing up as an Asimov fan, whose skinny books didn't let things like characterization or description get in his way of his plot. "Bob, the ship's captain, entered the Engineering Room," would be a typical Asimovian sentence that gave both characterization [Bob's a captain] *and* background description [there is a ship with an Engineering Room, and presumably interesting things will happen there]. But I digress.)

Which, 542 words later, leads me to tie this to my belief about Romantic games. Because roleplaying games, at their core, generally represent an even *bigger* investment of time than novels. First you need to read at least one rule or background book . . . generally taking at least as much time as reading a novel. Then as a player you need to create a character and a background; as a GM you need to create scads of NPCs and a plot. Both of these take time. Finally everyone needs to get together and play; now the player needs to make sure his character isn't killed in the first five minutes (bringing total time invested to 12 hours, five minutes).

(This reminds me of the old Genesis *Spider-Man* video game. In it you got access to all of Spidey's cool powers . . . but the game was difficult to control. Making matters worse is the fact that the game's designers padded gameplay by having lots of mundane enemies -- like dogs and rats -- nickel and dime you for damage. So a rat would skitter up, you'd fail to work the controls, it would bite you and run off. Take enough damage and you die. After a while of having piddling vermin deliver the coup de grace, I took to intoning gravely in a dramatic narrative voice, "The Day

Rats Killed Spider-Man." [As in, "Tune in next week for part four of our exciting story: 'The Day Rats Killed Spider-Man.'"] This amused my friends.)

Anyway, a roleplaying game session may last two to ten hours. A single story may take several sessions, spread out over the course of weeks or even months. I suspect that that many gamers -- the Romantics -- having invested so much time, effort, and often money into the game, want to at *least* make sure they get a good story out of it. If this is by "any means necessary" (fudging die rolls, having opportune clues pop up, stretching the plot, last-minute saves, or whatever), then so mote it be. And, of course, the group's need for a good story can directly affect the means needed; a group may be entirely Simulationist, except in situations where the story threatens to get stuck . . . then a matchbook-type clue or a witness may turn up. Ironically, it's possible to be entirely Simulationist in the way one approaches the Romantic; for example, you may have a strict Simulationist world, except for a [no-death policy](#), or "Hero Points" (or the like) you can use to modify the rules in-game.

Of course, beyond the desire to ensure an exciting story, there are many other possible appeals of the Romantic style of gaming: a chance to emulate a favorite genre . . . no matter how unrealistic, a desire to "do the right thing" without being necessarily punished for it, or even not *knowing* what the "realistic" thing is. (Movie/television law enforcement, for example, is almost always cooler and more exciting than the real deal.) But, ultimately, I suspect that the fear of a wasted and unsatisfying Saturday night is the biggest appeal of a Romantic convention.

It's no fun trying to be a hero, only to be eaten by rats.

* * *

Next week I'll be taking a break from my theory-type stuff here, but it should be back the week after. Unless, of course, the pitchfork-wielding villagers catch up with me before then.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Wizards**, p. 67.*

*(I received a couple of questions regarding this one. This book was published in 1983 as part of the Role Aids line of semi-compatible **AD&D** books from Mayfair. It contained information on various mythic and literary wizards, with introductions [in the literary cases] by the authors who created the character. Thus we have Roger Zelazny's *Shadowjack*, Gordon R. Dickson's *S. Carolinus*, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Lythande*, and Robert Lynn Asprin's *Aahz and Skeeve*. The latter is where the quote came from . . . apparently **Pyramid** has a number of **Myth-series** fans.)*

(Three stars) "Today, with 3,945,821 stores worldwide, Uncle Spud's Auto Stops & Comedy Shops™ are the number-one choice for innovative duelling supplies."

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Out of Body, Out of Mind

by Steven Marsh

Introduction

"Out of Body, Out of Mind" is an Adventure Pizza designed for a science fiction/space opera campaign. Depending on the game world, its premise may demand a fair amount of lead-in (see sidebar); science fiction games are notorious for their lack of a "common" background. It is, at its core, a morality challenge, with no easy answers.

Background

The GM must choose a "victim" for an incident. This person should be fairly important, and ideally have a code of honor but also be morally questionable; *Star Trek's* Captain Kirk or or *Star Wars'* Han Solo would be fine examples.

Anyway, after the Incident, life seems to return to normal . . . until one day (probably within a few days) the victim becomes aware of a severe (but not crippling) pain. Investigation by doctors reveals that he has Space Cancer. (No, it's not *called* Space Cancer; it's whatever dread disease exists in the future that's roughly analogous to cancer . . . slow-spreading but deadly, non-contagious, and generally incurable.) Furthermore, this case is fairly advanced; it's progressed through at least half of its spread rate; thus if Space Cancer would normally kill someone within a year, then testing shows the victim has had it for at least six months.

Curiouser and Curiouser

Presuming the victim normally has physical examinations, this should strike him -- and his doctor -- as impossible. (Of course, if the victim is the rugged "doctors be damned" sort, he may well have put off his last physical examination or four . . .)

Further investigation will lead to other clues; perhaps a childhood scar doesn't exist, perhaps an earlier medical transplant isn't present. Regardless, the victim should come to a conclusion: although the DNA is the same, this is *not* his body.

Turning Up The Heat

Depending on circumstances, the victim should eventually figure out that he has been in a bizarre accident; his body has been replaced with a parallel universe version, while his mind stayed here. The parallel version of the victim apparently had Space Cancer, and has had it for some time.

Letter To Myself

At this point the campaign's scientists should be working around the clock to figure out what's going on; through Scientific Gobbledygook (vibrational patterns, tachyon decay, the Force) they will be able to confirm what the victim should suspect.

The Incident

The lead-in to this adventure is problematic, since it requires an incident. This will require whatever McGuffin is plausible for the world.

Some examples:

- This adventure would probably be easiest to use in *Star Trek*, where transporter accidents are as common as mosquitoes. Of course, that universe has other possibilities, including omnipotent beings (this seems like a perfect Q test), alternate timelines, alien interference, and the like.
- It would be more difficult to work this into a *Star Wars* campaign, but it might be possible. The best bet would probably be some kind of alien Force artifact designed to tap into alternate and possible futures . . . but with a weird

Using this information, the scientists should be able to begin working to find a solution. Although it will take them some time to effect a solution (if that's even possible), using the Scientific Gobbledygook they *will* be able to come up with a means of communicating with his alternate self, by using the anchor of existing SG patterns and tweaking to allow messages to transfer along the connection between the alternate-version SG patterns with blah blah blah technobabble variance possibilities. The upshot of this is, through the use of a device, the victim will be able to communicate with his alternate self through "thinking" a word-based message. It's a slow process (akin to early 20th century telegraph), but exact.

(If the victim chooses not to communicate with himself, he will probably become startled to experience his alternate self start communicating with *him!* Clearly alternate world scientists work just as hard as their PC-counterparts . . .)

The Decision

Eventually, scientists will resolve how to reverse the process; this will be *much* easier if these scientists can communicate with their alternate universe counterparts through the victim.

At this point (or before, if the victim is contemplative) the victim will face a dilemma: is he willing to, in essence, kill his alternate self to save his own life?

Several elements can make this choice easier or more difficult:

- If either universe's self is in the midst of a crisis that demands a living hero, then they may decide the Space Cancer is best served in the *other* universe. Of course, both worlds may well be in such a crisis . . .
- If either universe has access to medicines, science, or magic unavailable in the other world, the victim(s) may well decide to send (or keep) the Space Cancer there. Of course, it's presumed that, if the other universe had a means of dealing with it, they would already have done so.
- If the alternate self is "evil," the decision is pretty simple for all but the most altruistic heroes. (Naturally, discerning that he *is* evil may be a challenge, with only a telegraph-rate exchange of information and ideas . . .)

Resolution

It's basically up to the victim(s) to decide what they want to do. The ultimate resolution will probably depend on what the GM chooses is necessary to reverse the process. If both sides need to make a decision and/or act at the same time, it will probably be fairly elaborate; both universe's victims will need to arrive at the same decision and work towards the same goal.

If, on the other hand, only one side needs to reverse the process (forcing the other side home), then the PC victim has more of a quandary. On the one hand it's easier to do since you don't need to convince your alternate-self to go along. On the other hand, it's a *lot* more difficult to look at yourself in the mirror knowing that you've sentenced an unwilling man to die . . .

For the O. Henry/deus ex machina ending, if the PC victim decides against transferring or doesn't make up his mind, the alternate victim may go through with the process instead . . . allowing a cross-dimensional heroic sacrifice.

effect on beings not of the originator's species.

- In a *Fading Suns* game, this would seem to be the result of an Ur artifact, or perhaps a jumpgate accident. This setting would have a particular challenge, given the religious aspect of the universe. Since Ur artifacts are usually considered to be holy, does that mean it's the Pancreator's will that you now have the disease?
- In a game set in a comic universe, this adventure should be fairly easy to incorporate. The DC Universe would probably involve a cosmic incident that has affected Hypertime; the Marvel Universe would probably involve an alternate timeline.
- In a *Torg* game, it's easy to blame it on the Infiniverse . . . especially if you assume a Reality Storm or some other big Cosmic Event.
- Aliens are always a good excuse . . . especially the big energy-cloud type. If, in a previous adventure, any of the heroes had their minds probed, controlled, or otherwise touched by an alien presence, it's possible that the alien presence has its

If the bodies are returned to their original places, the victim will no longer be able to communicate with his alternate self. His destiny, like the victim's, now lies in his own hands.

Side Salad

Scientists will be unable to bridge the dimensional gap directly before the Space Cancer kills either victim. But (presuming the Space Cancer is transferred back) some time *after* the disease would have presumably consumed the victim's alternate self, the scientists may be able to go to this other world. If the victim feels guilty or responsible enough, he may have the desire to go to this other world to either investigate or "set things right."

Extra Spice

"Out of Body, Out of Mind" is designed to be as straightforward or as convoluted as the GM (and players) would enjoy. At its core the dilemma is quite simple . . . but all manner of complications can be added.

- Presuming that the Space Cancer will leave the victim with six months left to live, this could well be a subplot that can last months. Woven among other adventures, this story can cause all kinds of angst . . . confusion, mystery, and thoughts of mortality. It can be difficult to fight the Moonworm of Trabos IV when the doctor warned you not to overexert yourself.
- Likewise during this time the victim may well have a "guardian angel," of sorts. This will depend on how fast, exactly, the GM decides communication with the other-victim is, and how portable (or non-) the device required to make contact is. The victim may be able to tap his alternate-self for information, advice, or guidance (especially if the alternate world has resolved problems still troubling the "real" world, or has access to information or resources unavailable to the victim). And the victim may well find himself being probed for information regarding *his* world . . .
- Given the possible length of the adventure, the GM may well want to allow the heroes to try to investigate solutions or possible cures to Space Cancer. How successful these adventures are is up to the GM.
- For a twist within a twist, what if the doctors determine that this Space Cancer sample, owing to its trans-dimensional trip, is special? The doctors may determine that it may be possible to devise a *cure* for Space Cancer, utilizing postmortem cells taken from the brain (or some other equally invasive surgery that cannot be performed while the victim is alive). Depending on the player and character, this may either make them sacrifice themselves for the greater good, or keep the Space Cancer with him for an extended period while the scientists try to see if they can get the possible cure without the death of the victim.

Much of the power of this adventure depends on what's happening in the alternate dimension. Some possibilities:

- **The same, but different.** Basically the alternate universe is the same as this one, only with minor differences (the victim did *not* cut his knee as a child). And, of course, the alternate victim has Space Cancer.
- **Alternate (?) timeline.** Any alternate history you would want to introduce (that still includes the victim, of course) can be used here. In fact, the timeline doesn't even need to be at the same time as the original; it's unlikely that someone would notice a year or two (or more!) difference in their own age . . . especially once they get to a professional age. If the alternate timeline is close enough to the original, the GM has two intriguing options; the alternate timeline may be in the future, meaning the victim has the possibility to get information about a (possible) future to help them. Or the alternate timeline may be in the past, which may give tinkering heroes the desire to warn the alternate universe of dangers in the future, or otherwise try to steer the

vibrational existence spread out over multiple timelines and dimensions (insert appropriate technobabble).

Regardless, blame the aliens.

- Likewise, if your game world has any kind of hyperspace or similar inter-dimensional region, it's entirely plausible to concoct a computer accident or other mishap to allow contact with an alternate reality.

In any of the alien artifact scenarios, it's presumed that the body-switching is a one-time occurrence, affecting the victim only. Of course, this doesn't need to be the case; how likely are you to notice if your body were replaced with an exact duplicate?

development of the other reality.

- **Mirror, mirror.** The alternate universe may be wildly different . . . even evil! This one would be a difficult one to GM, but could be intriguing. Of course, the more "alien" the alternate version of the victim is, the less likely the player may be to feel the compassion and attachment to their alternate self that this adventure would require.

In all, you have a possibility of running any stereotypical alternate universe adventure, while having it be unique; the heroes are communicating with another world and its problems without even being able to *see* that world . . . at five words a minute.

Finally, truly devious GMs may want to run a scenario well in advance of "Out of Body, Out of Mind" for the heroes . . . one involving radiation exposure for the victim (or whatever causes Space Cancer). The hero should escape unharmed, and he should have a full bill of health afterwards. In that way, not only is there an in-game reason for the alternate person to have the disease -- he wasn't as lucky as the victim -- but there's the possibility of future worry and adventure:

What if he has only delayed the deadly disease?

Rotgut Rumble in the Rockies

An Adventure Scenario for the *Deadlands* RPG

by Dylan Craig

Overview

The Posse sweats blood to get twenty barrels of booze into a frontier railroad town for the grand opening of a saloon there. What they don't know is that each of the barrels contains an undead critter, ready to leap out at the right moment to sow mayhem and devastation -- a Bayou Vermilion plot to disrupt Iron Dragon operations in the area. The heroes have to deal with Nosferatu, booze-soaked zombies, flocks of undead bats, and the Bayou Vermilion agents themselves if they hope to see the dawn.

Setup

The Posse find themselves in Jackson, Wyoming, at about the time that the wagon shipment has to go through. Jackson is a respectably sized frontier city, with a steady flow of fortune-seekers passing through it in both directions. The Rockies thrust up majestically to the West, and to the East lie the plains and hills of settled America. Junction Gap, their destination, is a tiny trading post which lies along the path of a new spur which is being built to bring together two divergent Iron Dragon lines, shortening the Deadwood line considerably and providing a secondary line in case of sabotage against the original track.

There are several ways in which Hans Grupp, the owner of Grupp & Sons Haulage, might approach them:

- **As an employer:** Grupp will pay the group \$250 in gold for the four days' work it will require to haul the booze to Junction Gap, plus a \$50 danger pay bonus per hero if there is any trouble along the route, payable on their return to Jackson.
- **As an old friend:** Grupp might be an old war buddy of one of the heroes, or a retired lawman who one of the characters studied under. He would certainly consider himself deeply in debt to anyone who helped him make this delivery.
- **As someone who can help them:** Access to Junction Gap is highly restricted -- only railroad employees and contractors are allowed in. If the Posse needs to get in to speak to a contact, track down a criminal who is suspected to be hiding out among the laborers, or find a missing person, taking Grupp's contract is the best way to do so.

The Posse may very well ask Grupp why he can't use his regular hauliers. He will sigh, frown, and grumpily explain that several local prospectors and trappers have gone missing in the mountains over the last fortnight, and his drivers, suspecting that the local Crow Indians are responsible for the disappearances, are refusing to make the trip unless armed guards are hired to accompany them. With Iron Dragon having hired up most of the local regulators and driven off all the others, there isn't a single affordable gunslinger left in the county; Grupp has spoken to some out-of-town contacts about importing shootists from the Maze, but it would be difficult and extremely expensive to get them to Wyoming in time. As things stand, the amount he is offering the Posse amounts to almost half his profit on the shipment; paying any more would be ruinatious.

A further complication may result if none of the characters have the Teamster skill. Hans Grupp is willing to spend an afternoon training two characters to drive and perform basic repairs on the wagons. These characters can gain 1 point in Teamster as a result of his excellent instruction. The regular passage of wagons to Junction Gap has left a well-worn track through the passes and forested slopes of the Eastern Rockies, and Grupp is confident that this rudimentary level of skill will allow the characters to make the journey with minimal effort.

Scene One: Leaving Jackson

The Posse may very well wish to investigate the disappearances before accepting Grupp's offer. An afternoon in Jackson's taverns and sheriff's office will, unfortunately, accomplish little in this regard except a list of the suspected victims.

Those missing include three prospectors (the Chappleton brothers: Isaac, Jacob, and Ezekiel), an itinerant preacher (Reverend Paul Mathee), a Texan trophy hunter (Col. Samuel Goode) and two locals he had hired as trackers (Mack Ferguson and John Two Trees), and a local madwoman (Jennifer Colqhoun), whose disappearance three days ago was the most recent.

Characters investigating the cases further (this will require a *Cognition* roll against a TN of 9) will realize that most of the disappearances are likely to have taken place on the very route they are about to travel, and that their frequency seems to be increasing.

No official search has yet taken place, although a letter has been dispatched to the territorial governor asking for help. General consensus among the townsfolk is that the disappearances are the work of the local Indian tribes, who have possibly been disturbed by the growing amount of rail traffic through their territory, and the locals whose livings take them into the mountains have begun to travel in larger and more well-armed groups. None of these groups have, as yet, reported any trouble with Crow warbands, so while the townsfolk are cautious, they are not in a state of complete panic yet.

Wagon Contents

The lead wagon's load is: two rolls of high-grade felt, two faro machines, a set of beer taps, a bottle rack, a crate of poker chips, cards and accessories, two crates of delicacies (salted cashews, pickles, capers, and oysters), a box of silver shot-glasses, and the provisions, trail gear and wagon tools. The rear wagon is loaded with: nine large kegs of beer stout, six casks of red bourbon whisky, a cask of Cuban white rum, and two cases of French wine and Champagne.

The merchants in Jackson have also thrown in an etched bar mirror, a cask of French cognac, and an ebony roulette wheel as freebies. These items are distributed evenly across both loads. The loads themselves are roped together tightly, with sacking and sawdust between the casks to stop them jarring. This means that the heroes will find it impossible to access the contents of any but the rear three casks of whiskey, a fact which become significant later if the heroes begin to suspect that their cargo is not all that it seems. The wagons are drawn by four oxen each.

Jackson's general stores and outfitters have more than enough stock to cater for any last-minute requests or provisions the heroes may have before they set off, although the wagons are fully outfitted in this regard. Grupp will also hand the heroes the papers they need to get into Junction Gap, which list the recipient of the delivery as a Mr. Vincent Green, the proprietor of the Rail Baron's Rest.

Scene Two: Get Them Dogies Rolling

The first two days of the journey are as uneventful as Grupp could have wished. The roads are relatively full of fellow-travellers; most, as indicated above, are traveling in well-armed groups. The terrain abruptly gives way to forested mountains on the second day, however, which makes the going a little harder and a little slower, and heralds the end of the regular road traffic seen up to this point.

A random encounter suited to your Posse might serve to provide atmosphere along the way. Chance meetings with a camp of traveling vagabonds, a random Army patrol, or a well-armed Pony Express rider returning from Junction Gap would all serve this purpose well. The Pony Express rider, in particular, will be able to clue the Posse in about the

condition of the track ahead (good), the state of the inhabitants of Junction Gap (thirsty), and the potential danger level of the journey (low, in her opinion). With regard to the latter inquiry, the rider will confide to the party that while she did imagine that she was being observed as she rode through the woods, she didn't actually see anything out of place, and attributes the feeling to the rumors of the disappearances having put her on edge.

By sunset on the second day, however, when civilization is well out of sight and the party have been surrounded by the gloomy mountain forests for several hours, a strange event will occur. As the track passes through a narrow cleft of rock, the oxen of the rear wagon (the one containing the casks of booze) begin to snort and jostle in their harnesses, slowing to a halt and exhibiting all the signs of being about to panic. At the same time, each character who is within 2 yards of the rear wagon should make a *Cognition* roll:

- 7+** The contents of the wagon are suddenly giving off waves of heat, and bubbles of boiling booze are visible at several cracks and joints. It is as if each barrel has been instantly brought to a boil by some strange influence. The barrels are holding together under the pressure for now, but they cannot be expected to do so for much longer.
- 9+** Several nooks and projections in the cleft hold unusual contents: bundles of burnt herbs, the melted stubs of candles, and clumps of strange dense ash. The placement of the items has a certain ritual look to it, centered on the ground which the rear wagon is now passing over.
- 11+** Two figures are crouching in the trees some six hundred yards away, on the opposite slope of the valley.

Anyone hoping to discern the specific features of the figures will require a spyglass or other means of visual enhancement, but will be able to make them out as Crow Indians, one of whom is carrying an ornate staff. At the first sign of trouble from the Posse, the two figures will step back into the trees and out of sight.

It will require a *Teamster* roll against a TN of 7 to shift the oxen out of the affected area. If this roll is failed, subsequent attempts may be made, but the TN increases by 2 for each failure. Needless to say, there is no possibility of moving the wagon without the oxens' cooperation.

If the characters have not moved the wagon five turns after the strange phenomena begin, the casks will begin to pop open, one by one, in steaming geysers of boiling booze. Skip to "Scene Four: Troublesome Spirits," below. If the wagons are moved a mere ten yards down the path, the bubbling stops and the barrels, while warm to the touch and slightly scorched, are undamaged.

Examining the Pass

Characters examining the ritual leftovers in the pass will need to make an *Academia: Occult* roll against a TN of 9. Those with the *Blessed* or *Shaman Arcane* Backgrounds may add 2 to this roll. Success indicates that the trappings are a mixture of traditional Indian spirit-magic fetishes and Christian religious supplies (votive candles and incense). The blend is reminiscent of that seen in Voodoo rituals, but it is impossible to tell what ritual occurred here from what still remains visible.

Magical lines of inquiry will not fare much better than mundane ones; the mystical energies that persist here are too confused to permit analysis. Such inquiries, however, confirm that the energies seem to be a mix of Judeo-Christian and shamanistic techniques. Inventive experimentation by the Posse is the only thing that might reveal the nature of the enchantment -- the area has been Sanctified (as per the Miracle), and has the usual effect on malevolent or diabolical entities. This is the cause of the strange agitation within the casks. Should the Posse discover this and decide to open or destroy the barrels, skip to "Scene Four: Troublesome Spirits," below.

A *Tracking* roll against a TN of 9 indicates that three adults seem to have performed this ritual the night before; one wore boots, and the other two wore moccasins.

Scene Three: Bushwhackers!

At noon on the third day, when the wagons have been following a contour path through a densely forested patch of slope for several hours, an obstruction on the track become visible approximately a hundred yards ahead and across a curve in the track. A tree has fallen across the path; characters with the *Eagle Eyes* edge or a spyglass will be able to see that the tree has been uprooted -- literally knocked out of the soil. The bush on around the track around the tree is particularly dense and foreboding, and includes several shadowy granite boulders taller than a man.

The Posse is faced with a difficult decision at this point. There is not enough space to turn the wagon around, but everything about the situation yells "ambush." However, what they might not realize is that the ambush is behind them, not up ahead. Two Crow are hiding behind a carefully constructed camouflage screen thirty yards up the slope and behind the rear wagon; observing the party. If the party abandon the wagons to investigate the tree, or leave them lightly guarded, they will begin to creep forward as quietly as possible. Their only handicap in this regard are the hissing fuses of the lit dynamite sticks one of them is carrying!

The Crow holding the dynamite will try to approach to within five yards of the wagon before tossing her sticks among the barrels; her partner will stay ten yards away, ready to give covering fire with a pair of flintlock muskets he has over his shoulder, and close in with his tomahawk if necessary. The dynamite thrower is his wife; he will not hesitate to take risks to save her or draw attention from her. Their stats can be found in "Boot Hill," below.

Each character who has remained with the wagons must make a *Cognition* roll. Subtract 2 for each person engaged in conversation within earshot of the wagon. To reach the wagons, the Crow will each need to make three rolls against the highest Cognition total among these rolls.

- **If any of the rolls fails by less than five**, those in the wagon will hear the snap of a twig somewhere in the area, but will be unable to pinpoint its source;
- **if the roll is between 5 and 9 points lower than the required total**, the characters will not only hear the noise but also be able to discern that it came from behind them and up the slope, and
- **if the roll fails by more than 9** one of the Crow has been spotted, and the characters may fire on them or take whatever actions they wish from that point onwards.

Each successful roll will bring the Crow ten yards closer to the wagons. The dynamite thrower's last 5-yard dash will not benefit from the concealment of the bushy slope. If any dynamite lands in the wagon, draw a card; the dynamite will explode on that card in the next combat round. Grabbing a stick of dynamite from the floor of the cluttered wagon requires a *Deftness* roll against a TN of 11, but a character may add 2 to their roll for each of the the following skills that they possess; *Fast Draw*, *Speed-Load*, *Sleight of Hand*, *Trade: Mining*, and *Demolition*.

If the dynamite goes off, skip to "Scene Four: Troublesome Spirits," below. The barrels provide one level of armor to everyone in the wagon, including the critters themselves.

If captured, the Crow refuse to talk to the Posse and will escape at the first opportunity. If placed in fear of their lives, they will close their eyes and recite a strange hybrid prayer made up of the same religious jumble as was apparent in the religious trappings at the pass. As these things turn out, however, these two saboteurs are the aunt and uncle of John Two Trees, the local scout who is one of the missing persons. If the barrels are opened in their presence, they will do their utmost to kill the undead being he has become, even if it means sacrificing their own lives to do so.

Posse members examining the fallen tree which started this whole mess will find a deeply embedded human-size handprint smashed into the bark. It appears that whoever knocked this tree over was strong enough to do it with a single openhanded slap . . .

Scene Four: Troublesome Spirits

Through suspiciousness, accidental rough handling, or pure lust for liquor, the Posse may find themselves face-to-face with the contents of the barrels. Before doing so, they will have to overcome certain difficulties.

For one thing, the barrels are tightly tied together. This means that only the rear three barrels can be accessed via the tail flap of the wagon -- the rest are protected by the sides of the wagon and the other barrels. Of course, it would be easy to breach one of them through its upper lid, but that would be hard to explain to the tavern owner in Junction Gap. If they are forced to pay for a broken barrel, they will more than likely make almost no money for this job. More surreptitious access is possible, of course, if the party are happy to simply bore a tiny hole in the side and let the booze trickle out -- say, into their waiting cups. Such a trickle is easily patched with the tar that is part of the wagon supplies, and would confirm that the barrels do indeed contain whiskey, stout, or whatever, and high-grade hooch at that. Encourage the Posse to sample the cargo -- this might come in handy (and amusing) later on.

A hole of the size mentioned will be too small to admit much in the way of skewers or other tools, should the characters wish to probe the barrels for hidden goods; in any case, the last three barrels -- the only ones they can comfortably reach -- don't contain anything suspicious; the undead beasts are all packed into the hindmost barrels, tucked up tight and floating in booze, waiting for the right signal to strike. Only if the party somehow manages to disturb any of their "passengers," or the barrels are broken open, will they come to life and attempt to kill everyone in sight.

The barrels contain ten Pickled Dead, three Nosferatu, and around a hundred Undead Bats (split up between the casks, around eight or ten to a cask). All relevant stats can be found in "Boot Hill." The Pickled Dead are the poor unfortunates that have gone missing in the area over the last fortnight -- the preacher, Texan hunter, guides, madwoman, prospectors, and so on, as well as a few the townsfolk haven't missed yet). They are still attired in their normal clothes and, due to the preserving effects of the booze, are not immediately recognizable as zombies.

As mentioned previously, the undead are supposed to wait for the commands of the houngan who is waiting for them in Junction Gap, but if they are prematurely discovered they will be more than happy to improvise, starting with the Posse. If, however, the Posse are content to sip at the booze and then continue on their way, then nothing will seem out of place until they reach Junction Gap.

Interlude: In Vino Veritas

Here's the story so far, Marshall, just in case you're scratching your head. Junction Gap is Iron Dragon's latest successful project, which should give them a definite edge in their race towards the Pacific. Construction is split up between several railheads in the area; these railheads are less than a fortnight from completion, Once the line is linked to Iron Dragon's existing tracks, Kang will have made a hundred-mile leapfrog ahead of his opposition, and will finally be able to shift some of his stretched private armies off the exposed southern tracks and back into more critical spots.

The town itself has grown up around a trading post which was established here to trade with the Crow; when Kang was allowed to build through this land by the Sioux Council, he decided to enlarge the settlement to serve as a resupply nexus for his multitudes of work crews -- and, to contain potentially troublesome regulators and locals in one place where he could keep an eye on them between assignments.

Unfortunately for Iron Dragon, Junction Gap's newest barkeep is a secret agent for Bayou Vermilion, and it was he who came up with the idea of smuggling some undead muscle into the town via a booze shipment. The disappearances have most of Kang's available regulators prowling the woods and protecting the rail crews, leaving the town well defended but still vulnerable to a surprise attack from within. 'Vincent Green' (real name: Vincenzo Verdi, a native of New Orleans) has been sent detailed instructions on how to command his deathless troops, and plans to use them the very night they are delivered in the hopes of catching a visiting party of Iron Dragon dignitaries who are currently in Junction Gap. Well, that's the plan, anyway. But like so many villainous plans, it doesn't take the presence of your

heroes into account! In addition, a powerful local Priest/Shaman by the name of Father Red Hair (yes, he has both Arcane Backgrounds, and a suitably unusual style of supernatural effect) has had a foreboding that some evil cargo will be transported to Junction Gap and be the cause of much death and misery; the Crow saboteurs were under orders from him, and it was he who sanctified the mountain pass. However, he has bigger fish to fry, and considers his part in stopping the wagon to be done -- if the saboteurs failed, it's Iron Dragon's problem now.

Scene Five: One Hell of a Party

The Iron Dragon pickets are strung well out from the town, and consist of five to ten Iron Dragon regulators (mostly local, but bulked up with conscripts from the Maze and led by one of Kang's hand-picked henchmen). The Posse will be stopped and asked for their papers several times before reaching Junction Gap itself. When they do reach the town's well-constructed wooden palisade wall (one of Kang's first investments), they will be forced to wait behind a two-wheel cart bearing fireworks (for the opening ceremony in a few weeks' time) for almost fifteen minutes while the driver is questioned about an irregularity on his manifest. Eventually, they will be ushered through the gate and pointed to the trading post which forms the center of the settlement. The guards will also perform a brief eyeball inspection of the characters' armament; pistols, rifles and so on are acceptable, but any Gatling pistols, dynamite, or flame-throwers will have to be locked away in the guard shed for the duration of their stay. By this time, it will be late afternoon. 'Vincent Green' will be on hand to receive the shipment, and will come across as warm and friendly, asking with great concern about any troubles the Posse may have had on the way. He will explain to them that the town hasn't had any potable liquor for over a month now, and that he is looking forward to a big opening party tonight -- to which the characters are invited, of course. He will also hand them \$15 each in Iron Dragon scrip (redeemable only within the town), and recommend that they try the Exquisite House of Vapors bath house to help them soak off the trail dust before sunset.

If the characters take the time to wander around the town a little (perhaps on their way to the bath house), they may be disappointed to find that it is as good an example of a boring company town as they come. Grim, double-story barracks dominate the town plan; most of the inhabitants live in tents or lean-tos. Most of the people on the street are Westerners; it appears that Junction Gap is equal parts shipping depot and round-eye quarantine camp, with none of the accouterment the Posse may have come to expect from the booming West. At least the bathhouse is worth the trip -- after the efficient ministrations of its gray-haired proprietress and her legions of assistants, the heroes are likely to be cleaner and more fragrant than they have been in weeks -- or, perhaps, ever. A bath costs 25c for gentlemen, or 50c for ladies (who get private tubs rather than communal ones). As far as overnight lodgings go, the only available rooms are in the Baron's Rest; the characters may sleep elsewhere for free (such as in a tent), but if they want a room they will have to pay standard rates, although breakfast is thrown in.

Junction Gap also has a large general store which sells everything except firearms. Ammunition, supplies, food, and items usually only found within the Maze (such as martial arts weapons), are all available.

The town will begin to fill up around six, as the various drovers, foremen and lumberjacks who call Junction Gap home begin to return from their days' labors; sunset and the opening of the Rail Baron's Rest come simultaneously at around seven. By eight, the place is packed; apart from a few very squashed card games taking place on hay-bales and empty gunpowder crates in the corners, everyone is on their feet and drinking like there was no tomorrow -- which, for most of these unfortunate revelers, is more likely than they might suspect . . .

"Green" has pitched the prices high, but not so high that everyone can't afford at least one drink; and, as the characters may well know, the hootch in the barrels is nothing if not potent. Soon, every one of the Rest's fifty or sixty customers is more than a little "likkered," packed shoulder-to-shoulder, singing along with the piano, dancing on the stage, and firing the occasional pistol shot into the ceiling. When the party is well under way -- introduce a random fist fight or beer-spilling to distract the Posse -- Green will duck momentarily behind the bar, complete the Voodoo incantation required to activate the Zombie Hootch in the barrels (see below for details, but these aren't important until someone with a gutful of the tainted liquor dies) and, laying his hand briefly on each of the barrels, give the critters within their long-awaited signal. At the same time, his two confederates outside the bar wedge the main doors closed with a horse trough. A few seconds later, the rack of barrels begins to shake alarmingly, and then one by one the barrels smash

open in a cloud of bats to reveal a dozen ghastly figures bent on slaughter!

Predictably, the saloon turns into a welter of fleeing, screaming, panicked, pistol-packing drunkards, and no one is safe. While the majority of the bats stream out the back door (which is the only viable exit from the saloon), followed by two of the Nosferatu and a few Pickled Dead, enough remain to stop the hysterical crowd of regulators from fleeing.

The combat in the bar should be resolved as follows:

- In advance, draw ten cards from a shuffled deck. Note these down on a piece of paper and use the character generation rules to convert them into dice combinations (2d4, 4d6, etc.)
- Now, note that each Club result (d4s) represents a pistol shot, each Diamond result (d6s) is a knife attack, and all other results are Brawlin' attacks. Pistol and Knife attacks do 3d6 lethal damage; Brawlin' attacks do 2d6 non-lethal damage.
- These combinations represent the attacks faced by each character stuck in the crowd, per round. Assign each set of dice a number from 1 to 10; every round in which a character remains in the saloon, roll a ten-sided dice and assign an attack of that type and number of dice to them -- someone has shot at them, stabbed them with a knife, or simply tried to batter them unconscious. Characters who are up against one of the walls, out of the general press of bodies, may make a Dodge roll against a TN of 7 to avoid the attack, and are never attacked on a Club (by a pistol); others must dodge or retaliate normally.
- Characters who are trying to get through the crowd (to attack the undead, perhaps, or reach the back door) can only do so if the action card they play is of the same suit as the attack they are facing that round; if the suit does not match, they may retaliate against their attacker or dodge, but they cannot get any closer to their objective. Conversely, if the suits match, they can get where they want to be even if the attack directed against them hits. The rules above are for heroes who are trying to get through the crowd with a minimum of bloodshed. Anyone who is intent on fighting their way through the crowd simply enters combat with the barfly who is attacking them this round; this combat continues until one party is knocked out or killed, at which point the winner may move to any point in the bar he or she likes. For each fighter put down in this manner, drop one card from the pool of attacks faced by the characters; if this number is rolled on the ten-sided dice, that character suffers no attack that round and may move as he or she pleases. Hence, if ten fighters are put down by the PCs, the crowd will have thinned to the point where no-one is attacking anyone but the undead critters and the heroes can join in or flee as they like.
- The effectiveness of various inventive means of crossing the bar or parting the crowd are left to your discretion; certainly, a swing on the wagon-wheel chandelier would be an option, as would starting a fire or using supernatural powers such as the *Harrowed Ghost* ability.

Anyone hoping to get out the back door will need to fight one of the Pickled Dead or, possibly, the last Nosferatu remaining in the bar, depending on how dangerous they seem to the undead.

Anyone trying to break the jammed doors down will need to deal 50 points of damage to the doors. Up to two characters may take turns to kick or shoulder-charge a door in every round, doing damage equal to a *Strength* roll. Note that the first person out of the main doors is likely to get hit with both barrels of a shotgun from a Bayou Vermilion agent lying in wait across the road. Outside, the sky is teeming with bats and the ground is strewn with the dead and half-dead. Horribly enough, some of the recently-killed are starting to rise back to their feet as Hootch Cadavers! This is the effect of the *Zombie Hootch*; effectively, anyone killed by the bite or claws of a creature soaked in this stuff rises as a zombie for 2d6 minutes before falling to the ground for good; this means that most of the town are now busy fighting not only the Bayou Vermilion infiltrators, but also the animated corpses of their own comrades. The same goes for the party members, of course; anyone who has consumed the *Voodoo Hootch* will rise as described, and any *Harrowed* must make an immediate *Dominion* check once the fighting starts to resist losing control to their *Manitou* for 1d6 rounds.

At this point, start keeping track of how many Pickled Dead and Nosferatu are left. Roll a single six-sided dice to see how many Pickled Dead the bar patrons managed to put down; add to this the number the party have personally accounted for, including the Nosferatu if necessary. Because of their short lifespan, the Hootch Cadavers are considered more of an environmental hazard than specific foes; the same goes for the bats on account of their numbers.

Eliminating the Bayou Vermilion agents and remaining undead should be on top of the characters' priorities.

No doubt, the characters will have several plans for accomplishing this goal. The most immediate plan that comes to mind for clearing the sky of bats is the massive load of fireworks the characters saw being brought in ahead of them. If the characters don't think of this on their own, you can always steer the fight over to the storage sheds and have a stray round ignite a lone firework, blasting a dozen bats from the sky, to give them a hint. As far as the other hazards the town offers, these can be handled wargame-style, or as random events using the guidelines below, based on each action card tossed in by your Posse as they move around their surroundings:

On a Deuce: a Hootch Cadaver lurches from the shadows to attack the character.

On a Three: an Undead Bat flits down to attack the character.

On a Queen: a panicked Iron Dragon regulator, dug in behind cover, opens fire on a random Posse member and will keep firing until killed or disarmed.

On a King: one of the Bayou Vermilion spies, concealed in the shadows alongside a building, opens fire on the most exposed Posse member. There are only three such agents; mark them off one by one as the party deal with them, saving "Green" for last.

On a Ace: a Pickled Dead (or Nosferatu if there are none left) attacks the character.

There are effectively limitless numbers of regulators and Cadavers. The same goes for the bats, unless your Posse can come up with some appropriately wide-effect attack to deal with them. Using the fireworks will require a *Deftness* roll against a TN of 7 for each shot. Characters with the *Demolition* or *Science: Chemistry* skills can add +2 to their rolls. For every success and raise, 1d6+1 bats are shot down. The characters have enough ammo for fifty shots. Once the Bats, Nosferatu, Bayou Vermilion agents and Pickled Dead are dealt with, the remaining regulators should have no trouble holding off the Hootch Cadavers until they run out of "juice."

In the aftermath of the fight, it should soon become apparent to the Posse that they are unlikely to be greeted with much warmth by the Iron Dragon regulators. They may wish to conduct a quick inventory of their surroundings with the hope of rounding up a little advance on their danger pay; in this case, each of the three main stores in the settlement (the bath house, the saloon, and the general store) will contain \$1d100 dollars in Iron Dragon scrip and \$3d6 in gold (\$6d6 for the saloon), as well as a few salvageable items. The scope and worth of such salvage is dependent on how many risks the Posse are willing to take; for each location searched, they have a 50% chance of encountering 1d6 Iron Dragon enforcers, who will shoot first and ask questions later.

The trip back to Jackson, assuming that's where the Posse decides to go next, is uneventful. They may wish to interrogate Grupp about the wagons; he will explain (if given a chance), that they were shipped by rail from Chicago (on a Bayou Vermilion train) ready-packed, and that he had no idea that they contained anything but booze. He is, as it happens, telling the truth. He will, of course, gladly pay the heroes the money he owes them for completing the job . . .

The End

Boot Hill

Crow Saboteurs

Corporeal: D: 3d6, N: 3d6, S: 1d8, Q: 2d10, V: 1d6

Mental: C: 2d10, K: 4d6, M: 2d6, Sm: 2d6, Sp: 2d10

Shootin': Rifle 3d6, Dodge 2d6, Sneak 4d6, Throwin' 3d6, Fightin': Tomahawk 2d6, Guts 3d10

Gear (#1): 2 x Flintlock rifles (R 20, Dmg 4d6, Sp 2), Tomahawk (Dmg STR+1d6, Sp 1)

Gear: (#2) 2 sticks of Dynamite, Tomahawk (Dmg DTR+1d6, Sp 1)

Iron Dragon Regulators

Corporeal: D: 3d8, N: 3d6, S: 4d6, Q: 2d10, V: 1d8

Mental: C: 2d8, K: 1d6, M: 2d6, Sm: 2d6, Sp: 2d8

Shootin': Rifle/Shotgun 3d6, Guts 1d6, Fightin': Brawling 2d6, Overawe 2d6, Quick Draw 2d10

Gear: Winchester Rifle (R 20, Dmg 4d8, Sp 2) or Double-barrel Shotgun (R10, Dmg 2+4d6, Sp 2), Truncheon

Note: For captains, replace long arm with a .45 Pistol (R 10, Dmg 3d6, Sp 1), Fightin' (Brawling) 2d6 with Fightin' (Sword) 4d6, and add a helmet and breastplate with Armor Value of 1.

Bayou Vermilion Infiltrators

Corporeal: D: 3d8, N: 3d6, S: 4d6, Q: 2d8, V: 1d8

Mental: C: 2d8, K: 1d6, M: 2d6, Sm: 2d6, Sp: 2d10

Academia: Occult 2d6, Shootin': Shotgun 3d6, Fightin': Knife 2d6, Sneak 3d6, Dodge 3d6, Guts 3d10

Gear: Double-barrel Shotgun (R10, Dmg 2+4d6, Sp 2), Knife

Note: "Vincent Green" has *Shootin': Shotgun 4d6* and carries a Winchester Lever-Action (Ammo 4, R 10, Sp 2, Dmg 2+4d6) instead of a double-barreled shotgun

Bar Patrons

Corporeal: D: 2d6, N: 3d6, S: 4d6, Q: 2d6, V: 3d8

Mental: C: 2d6, K: 1d6, M: 2d6, Sm: 2d6, Sp: 2d6

Shootin': Pistol 2d6, Fightin': Brawlin'/Wrasslin'/Knife 2d6, Throwin': Bar Stools 2d6, Guts 1d6

Gear: Colt .45 Pistol (R10, Dmg 3d6, Sp 2), Knife

Nosferatu

Corporeal: D: 2d6, N: 3d10, S: 3d12+2, Q: 4d12, V: 2d10

Mental: C: 2d8, K: 1d4, M: 1d8, Sm: 2d6, Sp: 1d4

Dodge 2d10, Climbin' 4d10, Fightin': Brawlin' 4d10, Sneak 5d10, Overawe 5d8

Pace: 10

Size: 6

Terror: 9

Damage: Claws (STR+1d4). If a Nosferatu hits with a raise in hand-to-hand combat, it can also bite its victim, doing an additional (STR) damage.

Undead: Nosferatu do not lose Wind, and ignore damage penalties as if they were Harrowed.

Weaknesses: Wood, holy water, beheading, and sunlight. Beheading or a wooden stake through the heart kills the Nosferatu, while each pint of holy water thrown on it causes 2d6 damage. Each round a Nosferatu has any flesh exposed to direct sunlight, it takes 3d6 damage.

Note: These undead, unlike regular Nosferatu, have the power to raise their victims as Hootch Cadavers (see below) due to their exposure to the Zombie Hootch.

Pickled Dead

Corporeal: D: 2d6, N: 2d8, S: 3d8, Q: 2d10, V: 2d8

Mental: C: 2d10, K: 1d6, M: 1d6, Sm: 1d6, Sp: 1d4

Shootin': Pistol 2d6, Climbin' 1d8, Dodge 2d8, Fightin': Brawlin' 3d8, Sneak 3d8, Overawe 5d6

Pace: 10

Size: 6

Terror: 9

Damage: Brawling (STR). If a Pickled Dead hits with a raise in hand-to-hand combat, it can also latch onto and begin to bite its victim, doing STR+1d4 damage every round until killed or pulled loose (requires a contested STR roll by the victim, +2 for every assistant).

Undead: Pickled Dead do not lose Wind, and ignore damage penalties as if they were Harrowed.

Weaknesses: Any penetrating incendiary attack (fire arrows, Soul Blasts, fireworks) which hits a Pickled Dead and does at least 6 points of damage causes it to explode into a cloud of evil-smelling alcohol fumes and rotten meat.

Note: These undead, unlike regular Walkin' Dead, have the power to raise their victims as Hootch Cadavers (see below) due to their exposure to the Zombie Hootch.

Hootch Cadavers

Corporeal: D: 1d6, N: 1d8, S: 1d8, Q: 1d10, V: 1d8

Mental: C: 1d10, K: 1d6, M: 1d6, Sm: 1d6, Sp: 1d4

Climbin' 1d8, Dodge 1d8, Fightin': Brawlin' 2d8, Sneak 2d8, Overawe 4d6

Pace: 8

Size: 6

Terror: 9

Damage: Brawling (STR)

Undead: Hootch Cadavers do not lose Wind, and ignore damage penalties as if they were Harrowed.

Weaknesses: Limited lifespan (2-12 minutes).

Undead Bats

Corporeal: D: 1d6, N: 5d8, S: 1d4, Q: 1d10, V: 1d8

Mental: C: 1d4, K: 1d4, M: 1d4, Sm: 1d4, Sp: 1d4

Dodge 1d8, Fightin': Bitin' 2d8

Pace: 16

Size: 2

Terror: 7

Damage: Brawling (STR)

Time Enough for Love

Getting Romance into your Super-Hero Games

by Brian Rogers

Romantic entanglements are part and parcel of the soap opera style permeating super-hero comics. Many of the great heroes have them, giving life to characters otherwise easily reduced to collections of powers bundled in colorful tights. Romance provides a counterbalance to the world shaking threats super-heroes face. It doesn't matter that Omniman can resist A-bombs and push the moon out of orbit when his goal is getting a date . . . giving the GM a surefire way to challenge the character and engage the player.

Unfortunately, many super-hero campaigns ignore this. Too many reduce presumptive lovers to people routinely threatened by giant lobsters. Too many romances become excuses to spotlight one character at the expense of the others. Too many players have problems with in-game romance. Here are guidelines for overcoming those difficulties, along with some odd takes on super-hero romantic relationships.

Mechanical Problems

The first problem with SHRPG romances is usually mechanical. Many game systems let players treat romantic relationships as disadvantages; the love interest is a Dependant Non-Player Character who appears in a certain percentage of sessions. Once there, she either keeps the hero from directly following up on the main plot or makes the main plot more complicated (usually because she's gotten herself tied to the claws of a giant lobster). For this, the hero receives some extra character points. Instead of being a central part of the hero's life, the romantic NPC becomes someone to rescue from natural disaster -- the super-hero equivalent of having a date for New Year's. How do you fix that? The same mechanics that cause the problem can help you.

- **Make the Romantic Interest Double as an Advantage:** Maybe she's an expert in magical mythology (contact) or a rich businesswoman who partially funds the hero team (patron). This gives the presumptive couple a reason to interact, directs the growth of the relationship, and gives even the most combat-heavy PC a reason to hang around with his Dependent in game . . . especially since it now looks like he's getting points for a benefit. The catch? The PC has to spend time and effort making the relationship work. After all, he didn't pay for that advantage, so if he wants to keep it he has to work at it, spending time in romance even when the dependent's skills aren't useful. If he doesn't, the next time he tries to call on his "free" contact, he'll find her dating someone else, and he'll have to win her back to get that help he need to fight the Darkness Demon. This is a good carrot and stick approach for mechanics heavy players.
- **Merge the Romance with Another Limitation:** The romantic interest could double as a professional rival (Lois Lane to Clark Kent), a member of the hero's rogues gallery (Catwoman to Batman) or even someone after the hero's head (Mina Harker to Dracula). Such relationships are usually different between the hero's costumed and secret ID (with the dependent loving the hero and being a rival of the secret, or vice versa), or even more twisted, where the love interest also has a dual identity or other hidden secrets. In general each new identity gives room for a new level of complication. Performing this sort of NPC double duty makes the GM's workload easier, reducing the total number of detailed NPCs in the game.
- **Build the Main Plot around the Romantic Interest:** This overlaps with the concept of giving the romantic interest another role, but in this case, that role is as the McGuffin. Regardless of how the heroine met him, what he does for a living or anything else, weird things keep happening to him. That's because he's the child of an alien abductee whose body contains Zeta Reticulian DNA that everybody from the Masons to the Greys are after. Every time the dice say he shows up, it's because he's dragging that plot with him. It may take some time for the heroes to even realize that the black helicopters and Geiger-esque aliens only show up when Amazonia's beau is around. This can work well in either a short campaign in which the love interest is the focus, or in a long game where the plot keeps leaping up out of the background.

- **Reward them for the Romance:** Set aside a few experience points a week as a roleplaying bonus for fulfilling social obligations. One of those social obligations is, of course, the romance. The PCs only get those points if you feel that the players are making a real effort to pursue the romance. Even people without DNPCs benefit from this . . . even more so, since their love interests, not saddled with the task of being a disadvantage, seem remarkably skilled at avoiding crustacean bondage. While this is definitely a "carrot" approach, it does wonders for increasing in game romantic roleplaying. Of course, those points shouldn't depend on romances -- you should award them for any other roleplaying oriented subplot -- but the simplicity of the romance plot should make it a common one.

Logistical Problems

Of course, there's still the problem that time spent on the romance is time spent on just one player out of the group. It's hard to draw a line between a good roleplaying opportunity and hogging the spotlight. One solution -- give everyone a DNPC -- just means more time away from the main plot, and more sitting around time for the group as a whole. It does mean that at least everyone is equally bored, but this is not something to shoot for. There are other, better ways.

- **Make the Relationship Fun for the Audience:** Players won't mind twenty minutes a week spent on Phoenix Talon's dating if the interaction is a hoot to watch. Most people think "drama" when planning romances, forgetting the other romantic resource: the sit-com. Endless bumbling, interesting mishaps and outside interventions can have the other players rolling every time the hero and his would-be love try and get together. Practice your witty repartee, prepare some pratfalls and remember Mike Pondsmith's classic advice from *Teenagers from Outer Space*: "Sex isn't funny. Frustration . . . now that's funny!"
- **Take the Romance out of Session:** Setting up a romance for a thespian or tragedian can open up a weekly hour-long angst wallow. To avoid this, rigidly enforce a short time period in game for the romance plot. Anything outside of those ten minutes must be handled out of session. You and the player could arrange for one on one sessions or trade e-mails, keeping the plot moving without slowing the game or having the others think you're playing favorites. This tactic works just as well for players uncomfortable with romance in front of the group; ask for a few minutes per session (something light, such as getting away from the love interest to change into costume) and handle the rest via e-mail, where the player can mention he's taking her out on another date to make up for the whole lobster-claws thing.
- **Make the Romance Doubly Useful:** Most of the advice mentioned above for game mechanics works just as well for logistics. Players accept spending time talking to contacts, patrons and plot related NPCs in a way that they may not accept romance. Even if those conversations are couched in the terms of romance, no time is "lost" to the plot. No one will feel slighted if Omniman's secret ID tries to get information by questioning his district attorney girlfriend over dinner, as long as it doesn't take longer in game than getting the information in other ways. When the main plot keeps the plot moving, everybody's happy.

Player Problems

Before you can put romance into practice, you have to get the player to agree. Many gamers find intimate personal relationships a touchy topic for any number of reasons. If you have such a player, you have to respect that . . . everyone has boundaries, and you as the GM shouldn't cross them. Let him know what you intend to do beforehand and ask his permission. If he doesn't like the idea, drop it and try a different player. Once you have one player willing to try, the following steps in game might bring the others along.

- **Play Up the Benefits of Romance:** While super-hero games usually focus on the hazards of romance ("How can I get away from Daisy May to become the Mountain Man without revealing my secret ID?"), it has many benefits. For example, after a brutal battle with their greatest foes the heroes return to their lives: the overly responsible heroine to her cramped apartment, the grim avenger to his sterile secret headquarters, and the romantic hero to his girlfriend's place, where she gives him hot chocolate and a backrub. One of these people seems to have a better deal. If having a romance becomes a perk, reticent players might decide that they too want that intangible advantage.
- **Keep the Romances Visible:** Dedicate a few minutes each session to the romantic NPC, even if the dice don't

have him showing up. This reinforces the DNPCs importance. After all, the dice only indicate that he has become important to the main plot, not that he doesn't exist. He calls the heroine up, tries to make a date, shows up at her office, or is there to pick up the dinner check. If the heroine is saving the world, he's trying to figure out where she is (and why Anna Zone is never around when the Justice Patrol is on a mission . . .) He should be part of the heroine's life, even when he isn't threatened by oversized crustaceans.

- **Fade to Black:** Use taste when dealing with the intimate or physical aspects of romance. People have problems enough listening to couples baby talk in restaurants; they don't want to hear it at the gaming table. Unless everyone agrees on a higher level of intimacy and physicality, assume that you're on prime time TV. Whenever things are about to get physical, shut the door. Whenever it's about to get mushy, cut to a new scene. If you're running it as a sit-com, then whenever intimacy approaches, so too does the hero's mother, a dozen costumed thugs and an alien hologram that only the hero can see. That has the same effect of closing the scene, but is much more fun for the other players.

Types of Relationships

When setting up a romantic plotline for a player, keep the source material in mind. Comic books are serial fiction, and in serial fiction not only is the path to true love not a smooth one, true love isn't too smooth either. There is never a permanent happily-ever-after until the series gets canceled. This means that the romance has to constantly provide new challenges and new story opportunities. While the daily aspects of dating and marriage provide plenty of fodder, the common comic relationship types listed below are particularly rife with possibilities.

- **Byzantine:** Unlike most forms of stories, super-hero RPGs offer the GM immense latitude for convoluted plots. In a Byzantine romance, there's always one more wrinkle . . . even if it changes hundreds of sessions of continuity. Discovering that your wife is not in fact the stolen girlfriend of a teammate, but is actually a shape-shifted alien spy who replaced the old love interest (placing her in suspended animation), and then fell in love with you, causing her to betray her people to marry you is not *that* uncommon. That she was assassinated immediately after revealing her alien state and released the original love interest (the one you thought you married) should be taken in stride. Did we mention that the original love interest is the daughter of one of your earliest foes? Don't worry; odds are that you'll be able to bring your alien spy wife back from the dead . . . assuming that it was actually her soul you brought out of the afterlife and not the disguised soul of one of your long dead adversaries who is now just waiting for a moment to strike. As a GM, you can use a Byzantine love interest to introduce any new plot twist, trusting that the hero will follow up, if only to find out who his true love really is . . . this time.
- **My Own Worst Enemy:** The heroine's romantic interest loves her heroic ID, but he is rivals with, indifferent to or somehow unable to date her secret ID. This works best with heroines that won't reveal their secret ID, and gives the clever GM lots of room to make the heroine's life wonderfully confusing. For a simple twist, turn it on its head, so that the romantic interest loves the secret ID but can't stand the heroine; this changes the relationship from comedy to drama, as a viable romance is now infected with a mysterious secret and conflicted emotions.
- **Tangled:** The hero doesn't have a single romantic interest . . . he has several. Oh, things may start with just one romantic interest, but then another one shows up, forcing the hero to make painful decisions. Once he does so, the selected love interest will leave for some reason (her family is moving, she's taking a job in Europe, something). The hero can then settle in to a new love interest, but sooner or later the first couple will return, now bring their current suitors in to increase the complexity. This is a romance style that has room for pathos or situation comedy, depending on how you play it.
- **Separated By The Law:** The love interest shares a secret passion with the heroine, but the two are on opposite sides of the law. This is the only thing standing in their way, but it's a big thing. While this is usually the love interest being part of her rogues gallery, it could just as easily be the crusading District Attorney and the "lawless" vigilante, the libertarian hero and the FBI agent, or anyone else separated by a political gap where one side has legal backing and the other does not. The rivalry guarantees that the plot remains vital: even after they "get together," their political differences can fuel plots for years.
- **Conspicuous In Its Absence:** One of the best romantic relationships for the grim vigilante is the obvious lack of one. Rather than having to settle issues with a single love interest, the hero grapples with the very need for romance. Any one of a number of potential romances enter his life, forcing him to question his dedication to the

crusade. The more he pushes romance away, the more isolated he becomes. The more he embraces it, the more his adversaries move in his absence. More than any other romance type, this is the definitive relationship for the Batman and all characters of his ilk: the war against crime is always out there, and embracing romance means diluting the passion that makes his activities possible.

'Til Death Do Us Part, And Then Some

Being the convoluted tale of three souls, two rings, one death, and a very bad day in China

by Michael Anguiano

A Band Of Gold

The Wedding Ring of Eloise Enzer is a simple band of 14 carat gold, approximately size three, inscribed "Eloise & Lambert June 15 1921." The surface is polished and bright, without visible wear or tarnish, with an apparent value of no more than the weight of the gold itself. To pursue the ring is to stumble into a hellish tangle of sibling rivalry and romantic betrayal.

The ring will snugly fit the ring finger of the left hand, regardless of the wearer's size, but will not quite fit any other finger. Under mystical or occult analysis, the ring resonates with a strong enchantment. The wearer receives a significant bonus to resisting magic, mystic, or occult influence. The wearer will heal much more quickly, so that a wound will heal in days rather than weeks, hours rather than days, etc. Any mystical or occult abilities of the wearer will be boosted. A mundane wearer, having no such abilities, will instead gain a boost in strength, agility, and physical resilience. These boosts will be minor as the ring attunes to the wearer, but will increase and reach full potential after a few months. The ring's benefits will abate if the ring is removed, but the attunement process will continue.

The ring's drawback is the wasting effect, which does not appear to be tied to the original enchantment of the ring. The wearer suffers a tiny but relentless loss of vitality. After six months, the wearer will appear to have aged one year. After one year the wearer will appear to have aged five years, a ratio which will remain constant thereafter. If removed from physical contact, the wasting effect will abate and the person's vitality will repair. However, the person will only recover roughly one-half of the lost years, and the remaining premature aging is permanent.

The ring is currently worn by Arabella Denfield. A woman of great beauty and fiery temperament, she appears to be in her early twenties. Most men find her charming, to say the least. Most women will find her annoying, catty, and disdainful. She is adept at deflecting queries about herself. When asked her age, she laughs and remarks that she has tried to age gracefully.

History Of A Bride: Eloise Denfield Enzer

Historical accounts state that the ring originated with Eloise Denfield, born in the early years of the 20th century. Eloise and her older sister, Arabella, were connected to an ancient line of occult practitioners, but Eloise showed no interest in the "Denfield gifts" for the dark arts. Living in Paris during the Great War, Eloise met and married Lambert Enzer, an American serviceman, and left with him for the States. The couple settled into polite society, raising two sons and a daughter. Lambert worked at a northeastern university, travelling extensively. In 1929, Lambert was in China with a group of American businessmen, procuring historical artifacts and artwork for various Western groups. Lambert abruptly terminated contact with Eloise and disappeared.

Eloise was reportedly convinced that Lambert had abandoned her for another woman. Enraged, Eloise turned to the dark arts she had denied, leaving the mundane world she had tried to embrace. With the assistance of her sister, Eloise called up a powerful dark lord and pledged herself in a compact for power, her wedding ring now a link to her dark lord. Accounts vary as to the identity of the particular dark lord but agree that Eloise Denfield Enzer became a Bride of Darkness. Drunken with power and rage, Eloise pronounced a dire curse of retribution upon her lost and faithless husband. She and her sister disappeared from the US.

Official accounts report Lambert's death in an outbreak of regional unrest, which claimed the entire group of travelers. His personal effects and decomposed remains were delivered months later to his next of kin. Lambert's relations had adopted the children and raised them in Eloise's continued absence.

Some accounts state that Eloise reappeared briefly a decade later, receiving nothing but scorn and anger from her alienated children, and left their lives for good. In any case, aided by her sister Arabella, Eloise became a notable figure in the world of the occult, gaining skills that bolstered her bargained power. The Wedding Ring of Eloise Enzer has become her legacy, an artifact which remains a link to the power of her dark lord. After Eloise's death in 1988, Arabella inherited the ring and has safeguarded it from those who would exploit her sister's death.

The Sister's Story: Arabella Denfield

Arabella Denfield has certainly aged with more grace than most. Born in 1902 near Edinburgh, Arabella is a talented and well-versed practitioner of "the dark arts." Proof of her abilities is that she has circumvented the wasting effect of the ring, despite fourteen years as primary possessor. Her familiars, however, don't last long.

The available accounts of the ring's history omit quite a bit, due to Arabella's tampering. In truth, Arabella met Lambert first. She toyed with him briefly but grew bored and let Eloise seduce him away. Arabella knew that the seduction would bolster Eloise's confidence while giving Arabella leverage with guilt. After the married couple's departure for the states, Arabella hatched a plan to convince Eloise to pledge herself as bride to a dark lord. This would gain Arabella access to great power while letting Eloise pay the cost.

After years of research, Arabella reappeared in Eloise's life and set her plan in motion. She slowly manipulated Eloise into suspecting that Lambert had been repeatedly unfaithful. Eloise came to believe that his trip to China was merely a cover, instead running away with another woman. The transformation into Bride of Darkness was simply a matter of Arabella presenting the right tidbits of arcane lore and sisterly advice.

The following decades saw the sisters working together, with Eloise as the visible figure of power. Arabella, meanwhile, brokered their deals and managed their resources. She knew that when Eloise died, the dark lord would arrive to claim his ring and to claim his bride. The ring could be removed by no other until then. She also knew that the ring would continue to resonate with power even after Eloise's death, so she would inherit the ring without price.

Under her pledge, Eloise could not regain youth and stave off death indefinitely, but she helped Arabella do so. Eventually Arabella would pass herself off as Eloise's niece when handling their business affairs. Eloise passed away in 1988 when their home burned down. Her ring was claimed by Arabella before the embers had a chance to cool.

In addition to her skill with the dark arts, Arabella is expert at manipulating people, honed by decades of practice. She consistently achieves her goals through diplomacy, charm, and seduction. She has virtually no records or paper trail, yet she seems to have access and resources everywhere.

If questioned by PCs, Arabella will simply say the ring is a family heirloom, denying any other value or significance. A PC with significant occult background has a small chance to recognize the ring or Arabella herself. Otherwise, background on Arabella or the ring must be gleaned through extensive occult research or consultation. Tech-based searches, such as Internet search engines, will be almost useless because of the absence of a paper trail.

PCs will have difficulty getting the ring from Arabella without her consent. Arabella is unpersuaded by money and will react to attempted seduction with amusement. Threats will provoke laughter. She will have a bodyguard or consort who will protect her from overt force. Arabella might barter for the ring if offered a sufficiently attractive trade, but won't mention that she can locate the ring with minor effort. When she wants it back, she'll come get it. Indeed, one of her diversions over recent years has been watching the progress of the ring from one wearer to another before reclaiming it.

If a female PC is particularly annoying or attractive, Arabella may simply give the ring to her as a gift, making a grand gesture out of giving something so personally valuable. She will also insist that the recipient wear the ring, knowing

that steady physical contact will ensure the wasting effect. After the wearer has suffered noticeable aging, Arabella will reappear to reclaim her property.

Arabella has not yet figured out that she has the wrong ring. Eloise Enzer was wearing her own wedding ring when she pledged herself as a bride, but she was wearing Lambert's wedding ring when she died.

The Groom: Lambert Barnard Enzer

Born in 1899, Lambert Barnard Enzer was attending university when the US entered WWI. He enlisted immediately. In Paris, he met Arabella Denfield, a beautiful young woman with plans to sell US equipment on the black market. When she realized that he wasn't interested, she moved on and Lambert began courting her sister Eloise, who was a much more pleasant person. Married on June 15, 1921, Lambert and Eloise had an increasingly turbulent marriage. Her initial interest was fueled by her rivalry with Arabella and later she was unwilling to admit that she might have been manipulated.

Once in the States, Lambert took a position with the university office that handled acquisitions for the library and assorted collections, which required frequent travel. Lambert was never unfaithful, despite occasional temptation and increasing motivation. His resolve wavered briefly when Arabella presented herself as an option to be considered reliable and discreet, but he nevertheless remained a loyal -- if increasingly frustrated -- husband. During the trip to China, Lambert and his associates were en route to a remote district when he went into violent seizures. He was immediately carried to the nearest shelter, where he underwent a horrific transformation.

Marriage is a union of two souls. The ring of matrimony embodies the unbroken and unending circle that binds the bride and groom. When Eloise pledged herself as a Bride of Darkness, her wedding ring became the link to her dark lord. Bound in union, the energies that surged through her ring as the bride also reached through Lambert's ring as the groom. As Eloise became a Bride of Darkness, Lambert became a fitting consort. The essential polarity of his life force shifted from positive to negative energies, transforming him. He had become a wight, a physically powerful undead creature that feeds upon the life force of others. Driven mad by the change, he destroyed the group of travelers and the surrounding village, leaving withered husks scattered across the countryside.

The Exceedingly Late Husband: Albion

Seven years later, Lambert had gained control over himself and returned to the States, only to find that someone else had been buried in a grave with his name. His wife and family lost to him, he allowed "Lambert Barnard Enzer" to remain dead and instead called himself Albion. He gradually built himself a life, so to speak, in the underbelly of society. He eventually found out about Eloise's pledge and pieced together what had happened on that day in 1929. He also realized something that Eloise and Arabella did not: he could remove Eloise's ring.

As a Bride of Darkness, Eloise's ring was the earthly icon of her status. Eloise and Arabella understood this to mean that the ring could be taken from her only when claimed by her dark lord. They were incorrect. The ring could be taken from her only by her betrothed, which included Lambert as well as her dark lord.

Despite his anger with her, Albion decided to offer Eloise a way out. As her betrothed, Albion would remove the wedding ring from her finger. Her eventual death would not summon her dark lord to claim her, and so she would be spared the consequences of her mistaken decision. This, Albion decided, would be his last gift to his wife: allowing her to look towards the end of her days with peace.

Eventually he found Eloise and tried to speak to her while Arabella was gone. Eloise did not recognize Albion, so she unleashed her powers upon the ghoulish thing that confronted her. Her ring was bound in union to his ring, however, and the energies that struck him were also shared out to her. Albion shrugged off the damage he received, but Eloise was struck unconscious. Realizing that he was going to have difficulty getting through to her, Albion went to plan B and removed her wedding ring, then replaced it with his. The switch was made and consequently her awareness or understanding would be helpful but not necessary. He discovered that his ring fit perfectly on her and her ring fit

perfectly on him, despite their original sizes, which he surmised was a result of the enchantment. The rings were otherwise identical except for the inscription on the bride's ring, "Lambert & Eloise June 15 1921," while the groom's inscription read "Eloise & Lambert June 15 1921."

When she regained consciousness, Eloise saw Albion, saw a wedding ring upon his finger, sensed its connection to hers, and promptly died of a massive heart attack. Shaken, Albion went to plan C: Set fire to the house and flee. Her dark lord did not appear when she died, however, so Albion presumed that her soul escaped to whatever reward it would otherwise deserve.

Albion decided to switch the rings back when he learned that Arabella had quickly claimed the ring from her sister's body. He knew that the true price had not yet been paid for the bride's ring. He felt that it was only just and right that Arabella should pay that price. Besides, he needed to be angry at someone, so it might as well be her. However, Albion is unsure how to do so without alerting her to the hidden dangers of the bride's ring.

Albion is striking in appearance, although rather typical for a wight. He is not recognizable from photos of Lambert Enzer. His lips, mucous membranes, and irises are black, while his skin looks pallid and bloodless. He is skeletally thin, his spare flesh drawn taut over a lean musculature. His face is skull-like, lacking nose, ears, or hair. Albion is heavier than he would appear, due to the density of his tissues, and so is much stronger and far tougher than any human. He uses physical contact to leech positive energies out of the living to sustain himself. He does not generate body heat and simply registers the ambient temperature. He does not need to eat and can function with very little air or sleep. Sunlight, direct or reflected, is extremely damaging to Albion, but holy objects do not affect him.

Maintaining a regimen of exercise and meditation, Albion has developed strong discipline and a stoic philosophy, which allowed him to gain control over himself and has solidified that control. Albion is also a very dangerous combatant. Aside from his formidable physical abilities, he has decades of training in martial arts. He has acquired significant combat experience and is an excellent rifle marksman.

The Bride's Ring

The bride's ring was the focus of Eloise's compact. The groom's ring is simply an echo and so is much less powerful. The bride's ring is not protection against Albion but will have a significant advantage against any other wearer of the groom's ring. With skill and focus, the wearer of the bride's ring can locate and possibly exert some control over the groom's ring's wearer, although this would require an awareness of both rings. The bride's ring cannot be taken from Albion without his consent, although this property does not benefit any other wearer of the ring.

The bride's ring provides powerful magical protection, strongly enhances sensitivities and perceptions, and accelerates healing. The ring fuels mystical power and abilities, neither of which Albion has, but does allow him to forego feeding. With concentration, the ring allows the wearer to see the true nature of a subject, piercing illusion and disguise.

If the wearer dies, the bride's ring will summon the dark lord of Eloise's pledge, who will come to claim his ring and claim his Bride. Upon finding that Eloise has escaped, the dark lord will be most upset, collecting the wearer and probably anyone else in the immediate vicinity.

If Albion removes the bride's ring he wears, the wasting effect of the groom's ring worn by Arabella will cease. He is not aware that his leeching of energies draws mildly but inevitably from the wearer of the groom's ring. However, the healing effect of the groom's ring is somewhat at Albion's expense as the absorbed damage is passed through the bride's ring and onward to Eloise's dark lord.

Wearing both rings will short-circuit the mystical power involved, creating a feedback loop and leading within a few minutes to a spectacular release of energy. This destroys the rings and the wearer, as well as summoning a very annoyed dark lord. The rings cannot be removed once this has begun. Dismemberment will not stop the building feedback loop, but the former wearer can try to escape before the detonation.

A Vicious Circle

Thus stands the current situation:

- Arabella Denfield is an amoral, manipulative spitfire with occult skills and power. She thinks she possesses the Wedding Ring of Eloise Enzer, who was her sister. Arabella does not realize:
 - two rings exist, the (weaker) groom's ring and the (stronger) bride's ring;
 - the ring Arabella wears is actually the groom's ring;
 - her brother-in-law is now undead and has the bride's ring;
 - Eloise died without wearing the ring, so the price of the bride's ring has not been paid.
- Eloise Enzer is dead. During her life, she never knew:
 - her lost husband, Lambert, was never unfaithful;
 - her sister, Arabella, used her as a pawn to gain power;
 - her pledge as Bride of Darkness twisted her human husband into a reflection of her newly-pledged dark lord;
 - the creature that appeared to her in her final moments was not her dark lord, but was actually her lost husband.
- Lambert Enzer is undead. Educated and mannered in life, he is now a wight called Albion, tough, stoic, and just a tad bitter. He knows more than anyone else about the whole sordid situation. He wears the bride's ring, knows that Arabella has the groom's ring, and wants to switch the rings so that the dark lord will claim her as bride upon her death. He does not know:
 - that Arabella orchestrated the events leading to his death;
 - the wasting effect of the groom's ring;
 - how to switch rings with Arabella without alerting her.

Size And Fit: Adventure Seeds

The Wedding Ring of Eloise Enzer can be fit into any contemporary campaign which allows for at least a minimal level of magical or occult activity. PCs should have some familiarity with the occult and undead, as well as access to appropriate investigative resources. If the PCs insist on being clueless and pushy, they could end up in the middle of an open war between a powerful and resourceful occultist and an undead guy with a very large chip on a very strong shoulder. Useful elements can include the groom's ring (mistakenly worn by Arabella), the bride's ring (currently worn by Albion), Eloise as a Bride of Darkness, the muddled historical records, and the past or current activities of Arabella.

- The groom's ring can be used as an objective which the PCs must find or steal. Mission information or independent research will point them to Arabella, who can be a useful ally or a resourceful enemy. Unless the PCs are significantly powerful, Arabella will not find them particularly threatening and may have some fun toying with them, possibly even letting them get the ring and think they've escaped with it. She would be especially interested in why they were coming after her and who sent them.
- Alternately, the groom's ring has gone missing after Arabella presented it to a romantic rival. In one case, the PCs are investigating a model's death by an inexplicable wasting disease; Arabella comes to claim her ring from the body. In another case, Arabella is trying to find her own ring and inadvertently locates Albion with the bride's ring. She doesn't recognize Albion, so she hires the PCs to recover the ring while she watches to find out who he is and how he got it.
- A third possibility is that the PCs are hired by the Eloise's dark lord, either directly or anonymously through an intermediary. The PCs are then trailed by shadowy figures, who may work for their employer or for a rival. When the PCs unravel the confusion between the rings, they must act on the information quickly before their employer learns and acts to resolve the problem of payment, i.e. decides to claim whichever of the PCs is holding the ring right now.
- If the PCs are able to communicate with the dead, they can attempt to reach Eloise's spirit. After some persuasion by the PCs, Eloise's spirit will carefully steer the PCs in Albion's direction, with the ultimate intent of putting the bride's ring into Arabella's hands. Eloise's spirit realizes the ring's debt is unpaid and wants Arabella to pay it, using the PCs as tools to accomplish that. No attempt will succeed in Arabella's presence, but the spirit

will speak to Albion and attempt to win his cooperation. He is willing to go along with the plan and relinquish the ring to the PCs, but will follow in the background to observe.

- The historical record notes that Eloise abandoned their children to Lambert's relations, but not that the children were subsequently adopted by cousins with a different surname. As a result, Albion has living children and grandchildren who do not bear his name. This hidden thread of history could tie Albion or Arabella, or both, into an ongoing campaign. The PCs could become involved with one of the Enzer descendents, leading to threats sufficient to attract Albion's concern. Conversely, one of the PCs could be an Enzer descendant, who would then discover that some white ghoulish dead guy was lurking in the background. Additionally, Arabella might show up to recruit an apprentice from her sister's descendents, passing herself off as a distant cousin. Albion will be extremely displeased by this development, with the PCs caught in the middle.
- In a campaign world with an underground population of undead, Albion discovers that one of his descendents is being trained as a hunter. Without revealing himself or the family secret, Albion has to deflect the hunter group and protect the kid. Undead PCs might clash with Albion over his actions or the hunter's actions, while living PCs might run into him when hunting undead.
- If Hell is a viable game locale, PCs might meet Eloise there, carefully avoiding the attention of the dark lord she inadvertently cheated. She has surmised some of the facts about the rings, but doesn't understand Albion's role or Arabella's manipulations. While loath to jeopardize her precarious situation, Eloise will feel safer once someone else has paid the price for her pledge, so she will try to mislead PCs into seeking the bride's ring in the most dangerous way possible. Of course, the death of the ring-wearing PC would require the remaining PCs to journey to Hell to recover their comrade, contending along the way with Eloise's dark lord.

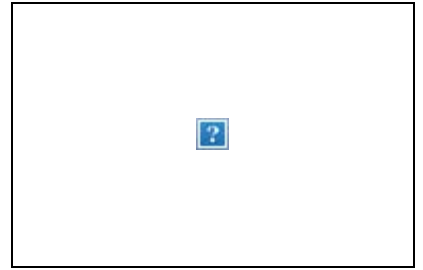
Pyramid Review

Nexus Card Game

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

48 cards and rules sheet; \$4.00



How many times have you thought to yourself, "Sure, I'd love to get into Cheapass Games, if only they weren't do darned expensive"? Salvation is at hand for you miserly types in the form of Hip Pocket Games, "a Tiny Little Division of Cheapass Games." Although it has released only two games so far, *Nexus* and the re-release of *The Very Clever Pipe Game*, Hip Pocket Games aims to provide big fun in small packages. Both games are sold with just the necessary cards, a rules sheet, and a ziplock bag.

Nexus is an abstract strategy game for two to four players requiring only the cards, 20 counters of a different color for each player, and a table, preferably a large one. (According to the rules, if you run out of room "you must extend the table top with nails and glue before you can proceed.") The rules are simple, the play is quick unless your opponents ponder their moves for an eternity, and the strategy is interesting enough for repeat play.

The cards are long and illustrated in green and white; each of the cards contains a set of "Connectors" and "Nodes." A Connector is a pipe that starts at a Node and runs off of one of the four sides of the card. A Node is a circle or oval where Connectors end, or where multiple Connectors join each other. Every card has a Connector running off of each of its four sides, but whether they join each other at Nodes varies from card to card. For example, some cards have all four Connectors joining in a large Node in the center, while other cards join two Connectors at one Node, and the other two Connectors end in Nodes that are not attached to any other.

The game begins with a single card in the center of the table. In turn, each player draws a card from the deck and must play it adjacent to at least one card on the table in a basket-weave pattern (long edge to short edge). Players do not hold hands of cards; they simply play the top card of the deck each time. Because every card has a Connector running off of each side, players can play any card next to any other. Finding a strategically sound spot is a challenge.

Next, any closed Nexuses score. A "Nexus" is a set of contiguous Connectors and Nodes running over several cards. It is closed when all of its Connectors end in Nodes that are not attached to other Nexuses. Visually, this is very similar to a closed pipe that does not join any other pipes on the board. The player that controls this closed Nexus scores points for it, and the first person to score ten points wins.

Players take control of Nexuses during the last part of their turn. The player places one of her counters on a Node in any open Nexus. Each Node may have only one counter on it, but a Nexus may have several different color counters on different Nodes. Essentially, the player with the most counters in a Nexus controls it, and scores points when it closes. In the case of a tie, no one scores any points for the closed Nexus.

The game's clever twist is that the more counters a Nexus has, the fewer points it is worth. A Nexus' point value counts only the Nodes that do not have counters. If several players vie for control of a large Nexus, their competition may reduce it to a value of only one or two points.

Nexus' strategic depth comes from placing cards to help your self or hinder your opponents, and playing your counters to do the same. If your opponent is near to closing a Nexus and scoring points, you may draw a card that extends the Nexus in several more directions, making it harder to close. If you do not get the right card, you can play your counter into the Nexus to attempt to control it, or to simply make it worth fewer points. In games of three or four, you can also

ignore the threatening Nexus, forcing one of the other players to do your dirty work for you. At the same time, you have to balance between offensive and defensive moves to get to ten points first.

Nexus is easy to learn; however, experienced players may become too skilled for their own good. As players' knowledge of the game progresses, closing Nexuses for more than one or two points becomes nearly impossible. This is due to the rest of the table's skill at ganging up on the leader. This type of play increases the importance of the luck of the draw from the card deck and may lead to a more frustrating game.

By the time players reach this level, however, the game has provided more than enough entertainment to justify its price. For those who enjoy abstract strategy games and who play with ruthless efficiency, Nexus is a great bargain.

--*Brad Weier*

Pyramid Review

Dead From Above (for Weird War II/d20)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by John R. Hopler & Aaron Rosenberg

Illustrated by Chris Appel, Cheyenne Wright and Scott Roller

64 pages; \$15.00

Dead From Above is the air combat supplement for the *Weird War: Weird War II* setting from Pinnacle Entertainment Group, which uses the *d20* system. Aerial combat was barely touched upon by the core rulebook, *Blood on the Rhine*, with just the inclusion of the Pilot character class and the airman variant of the Grunt class. An abstract system was given in the Hell in the Hedgerows adventure anthology, though even the authors you suggested that *Dead From Above* be used instead.

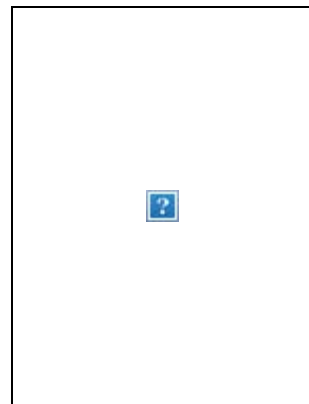
Behind Chris Appel's fun cover, *Dead From Above* is nicely laid out with a range of art that really captures the fear of being attacked in the air by something supernatural. One problem is that the art does not always leave room for the text, sometimes crushing words into a jumble of letters. To be blunt, this has happened in previous supplements from Pinnacle, and since this is easily corrected with whatever desktop publishing software they are using, it is something they need to look at.

Dead From Above is divided into four chapters, containing the rules, a selection of aircraft, a scenario, and an aerial bestiary. Chapter one is also titled "Dead From Above," and contains all of the rules for both characters and flying. It presents the Pilot class from *Blood on the Rhine* in expanded detail, along with new skills (Bombardier and Navigation), plus several new feats. These include the feats natural to a character, such as Seat of the Pants (the character is a natural flyer) and Snap Shot (the character is skilled at lining up a shot in a dogfight). Other feats pertain directly to flying; all pilots begin the game with the Single-Engine Aircraft Proficiency feat, but if they are to fly bombers such as the Flying Fortress or twin-engined airplanes like the Mosquito and the Lightning, then they will need to take the Multi-Engine Aircraft Proficiency feat at second level.

Although it is standard to the *d20* System, the -4 penalty for flying an aeroplane unskilled that is without either of the Single-Engine or Multi-Engine Aircraft Proficiency feats does seem rather low. The -4 penalty seems perfectly reasonable for a pilot who can fly single-engine airplanes, when he attempts to take an aircraft into the sky that has more than one engine. If you have neither, then an -8 penalty might be something more reasonable . . .

The remainder of this chapter looks at aerial combat and bombing. The key to air-to-air dueling is the concept of Position, which is a measure of an aircraft's or an aircraft formation's tactical position during a battle. The lowest possible Position is that of zero, at which point the aircraft is flying low, slow, or is pushed to the limits of its performance envelope such that its pilot might lose control. The highest possible Position is that of ten, and these higher Positions represent greater advantages in terms of speed, altitude, and tactical superiority.

Pilots need to make rolls on their Piloting skill in order to gain Position over their opponents, modified by the maneuverability of their aircraft. Attempting attacks requires more skill rolls, but it also costs the attacker in terms of their Position. Thus, having made an attack, a pilot will need to jockey for position before they can make further attack runs on their opponent. Damage is resolved in the same manner as the vehicle combat in *Blood on the Rhine*, but of



course, with different hit locations and critical tables. Critical hits often result in a loss of maneuverability and Position, and may require piloting rolls if the pilot is to maintain control. Additional rules cover bombing -- both level and dive, strafing runs and calling in air strikes. Damage listings are given for bombs weighing from one hundred to four thousand pounds, as well as 2.75 and 5-inch rockets. The bombs in particular are ferociously lethal, not just due to the explosive damage, but also to the concussive over pressure as well. These rules allow *Dead From Above* to be integrated with the ground war detailed in *Blood on the Rhine*.

Chapter Two is Aircraft profiles, detailing nine German, six British, and nine American airplanes. Although this seems a little disproportionate for those wanting to play RAF crew, but really the selection is adequate for most needs. That said, the range is fairly standard, and does not get any more esoteric than the jet fighter, the Me-262 and the rocket interceptor, the Me-162.

[SPOILER ALERT]

The third chapter is "Memphis Hell," a scenario for beginning aircrew characters, although there is room for perhaps one Resistance Fighter character and possibly one member of the Office of Supernatural Investigations (OSI), allowing a player to take a slightly higher level character . . . presumably having taken one of the prestige Classes available once their character is in the OSI. In "Memphis Hell," the party are sent on a special mission to locate a downed B-17 Flying Fortress in the mountains near Dijon in central France. For those not wishing to play an American aircrew, almost any other Allied nationalities could be found flying a Lancaster for the RAF instead. Once they have located the bomber, known as Memphis Blues, they must fly her into Germany and bomb the factory that manufactures the V-1 Flying Bombs. Parachuting into France and hoofing it through the mountains -- while chased by Wermacht patrols -- will prove something of a challenge for the normally aircraft-bound characters, and they should be relieved to locate and get the aeroplane out of there.

This is where it gets really interesting, as it should strike everyone that it is odd to find a pristine Flying Fortress sitting ready to take off in the middle of occupied France. The Memphis Blues has a history . . . indeed, *personality* of its own, and dealing with her -- or should I say "him"? -- will prove to be as much a roleplaying challenge as flying into Germany is a test of the character's skills. For introducing pilot and aircrew characters to the supernatural dangers in *Weird War II*, "Memphis Hell" is an excellent scenario.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The last and fourth chapter is "Fly The Deadly Skies," an aerial bestiary that contains ten new creatures to be encountered over the skies of Europe. An adventure seed, some of which are quite good, accompanies each of them. The ubiquitous Foo Fighter could be used as a method to introduce the alien Greys into the setting of *Blood on the Rhine*, if the War Master wishes to take his game in the direction of *Delta Green* or *GURPS Black Ops*. Alternatively and simply, they could be just an excuse for the War Master to get the character to take a trip to Antarctica in the course of investigating the mysterious Foo Fighters. Also good are the Fliegerkopf -- rocket fighters piloted by the resurrected skulls of Nazi war aces. The accompanying seed has one such skull finding his current existence less than his liking and wanting to enlist the aid of the characters. Other adventure seeds are less interesting, and some, like those for the Acid Cloud, Cloudkill and Death Cloud are all rather similar. Also, unlike the other creatures in this chapter, none of these three are given anything approaching an explanation as to their origins.

If the War Master wants to add aerial combat and bombing to their game, then *Dead From Above* is the supplement that they need. Yet if you break down what you get for your \$15, this book does not provide as much value as it should have. You get twenty-two pages of rules, aeroplane profiles and record sheets, a twenty-one-page scenario and fourteen pages of new monsters. Really, these rules are so basic and integral to the game that they could have easily gone into the main setting book, *Weird War II: Blood on the Rhine*. Had they done so, this would have left room for possibly more monsters or aircraft profiles, but preferably more scenarios. While good, "Memphis Hell" is only intended to bring the characters to the attention of the OSI, and not end with their recruitment. Were there more adventures set after "Memphis Hell," like the *Hell in the Hedgerows* anthology, these could have helped the War Master get his party of aircrew characters so recruited. Certainly such adventures would have been of a far greater use to the War Master, because I would suggest that it is more difficult to come up with suitable scenarios for an aircrew.

Finally, \$15 seems a lot for what is a sixty-four-page book -- especially when other *d20* system publishers are providing supplements and adventures with more pages and material for this price or less. (And this is only when you compare it to other *d20* system publishers and not with the output of other game lines . . .) In the final analysis, *Dead From Above* does give just about everything you need, but absolutely nothing more, and that is its biggest downfall.

--*Matthew Pook*

Sex! (Now That I Have Your Attention . . .)

(We interrupt the interminable *Simulationist/Romantic* series to bring you something more tied to Valentine's Day.)

After considerable research, I have concluded that humans have been having sex for over 120 years. Not even the same humans . . . no! But wide and varied groups of people, across economic, social, and ethnic backgrounds . . . far too many people for this to be mere statistical coincidence.

And yet for something that is as much a part of modern living as automobiles, corporate radio, and snacks, intimate relations get hardly any airplay in most campaigns. This is despite the fact that most RPGs have rules for other id-centric desires, like sleeping and eating.

(As an aside, I note that my Webster's also defines "id" as "a skin rash that is an allergic reaction to an agent causing an infection." Having learned this, I *really* want to use this somehow. "Holy moley! Dr. Jekyll has taken the formula, and has given entirely over to his id!" "Raaaargh! <scritch scritch scritch scritch> Burning redness!")

Of course, the reasons for the lack of this incorporation are myriad and (for the most part) obvious; many people have difficulty discussing any kind of frank matters with people they *love*, let alone the weird guy rolling dice behind the duck blind.

Even so, as a basic drive -- and the motivating force behind many tales -- it seems somewhat restrictive to ignore an entire possibility of storytelling. But just because the group is willing to bring up more intimate storylines doesn't mean your campaign needs to resemble a Susie Bright erotica collection. All manner of media resolve the matter discreetly, from the "fade to black/wake up cooking eggs in a bathrobe" of a movie, to the coy "And that which did happen, did happen" of a novel.

So if you're going to delve into the realm of the intimate, allow me to present two ground rules. These apply to romantic in-game issues in general, but especially to more "closed-door" material.

Rule One: Romantic Descriptions Are Lowest Common Denominator. No, I don't mean guttural. What this means is that, really, the scene should only continue as long as *everyone* is comfortable. Hopefully everyone is on the same page when you begin such stories (or you've talked about it beforehand); if not, I don't think it's too unreasonable to raise a mild objection, or talk about how the game made you feel awkward afterwards. If things get *too* uncomfortable during the session, it's not unreasonable to go out to get some potato chips. From the factory. You have my permission to kick the GM afterwards.

Likewise, you should recognize as a player or a GM when you may be going over the line; it's always best to stay well *before* that line, really . . . you can always get more descriptive in private sessions, by journal, or what have you. Once you've freaked out your friends, it's tough to defreak them.

Rule Two: It Ain't You. In its own way, I think Rule Two is more important to Rule One; Rule One should really be followed by everyone for most games. (If someone's uncomfortable about graphic depictions of violence, he shouldn't need to sit there while the players and GM rattle off excruciating detail about and cracked skulls and carnage and whiskers on kittens.)

Anyway, It Ain't You. You aren't your character. Your character was raised as a monk to be trained as the master assassin, and has never known the caress of another? It ain't you. Your character has feelings for an alien species? It ain't you. Your character draws upon carnal energies to fuel his dark rituals? It ain't you. You ain't no senator's son.

Your character can be as dark or as light, as mysterious or as romantic, as inexperienced or as knowledgeable as you want. Hopefully your friends won't yell across a crowded mall, "Watch out! That guy slept with Zeus!" (If they *do*, you may want to reevaluate your friendships . . .) And, since you're not your character, you can do things -- bad or good -- that would otherwise be difficult; whisking your lover off to a weekend in Paris is probably a lot easier for your

millionaire character than for you. Okay; now that we know the ground rules, how do you go about working in intimate relations into a game?

Awakenings

Well, first think about whether or not it's even an *issue* for your character. We start out without knowledge of a lot of things, yet only upon certain ones does society place much importance. (For example, I have never been called either a New Jersey Virgin or an Innocent in the Ways of Corn Dogs.) Regardless, when thinking about a character's sexuality, pondering one's experience -- or lack thereof -- is a fine place to start. Those early encounters can do much to shape the outlook of the character; relations born of love, passion, convenience, anger, or desperation are all possible hooks to help explain why a character is.

Of course, that presumes the character has had sex at all. If he hasn't, why not? Is it a personal decision, a vow, or perhaps a lack of opportunity, time, and/or interest? In mystic or mythic campaigns chastity is often a source of power . . . or a curse. In tragic or gothic campaigns it may be impossible for a character to interact with others on an intimate level. Maybe the character can't touch others (ala Midas or the X-Man Rogue); maybe the character simply doesn't have those feelings anymore (ala many vampires).

Or maybe that "first time" is, for whatever reason, meaningless. If the character is immortal, amnesiac, or otherwise unsure of reality, then those early notions may not apply . . . which may be traumatic in its own way. They say you never forget your first time; what if they're wrong?

Even if this information never comes into play, at least knowing the answer may give you a better idea about the nature of the character. *And* whether or not you can get close to that herd of unicorns . . .

Parts of the Whole

Probably the easiest way to work intimate relations into a game is through allusion and slight of hand. You don't need to get graphic; just give enough for everyone else to get the idea . . . and use their imaginations.

"I've spent six weeks in the Dreaming away from my husband; anyone who disturbs our chambers will be punished. Leave food and water outside the door."

"I spend too much time at the precinct; we just don't communicate anymore. She . . . she needs things I can't provide."

"Personally I don't consider it cheating if you're seeing *both* members of a marriage."

"Yes, I bought a dozen roses. But I really only need the petals. Bruce, I'm sure *you* have use for the thorny stems, eh?"

"This is too dangerous a line of work. Janie and I . . . we're trying to start a family. If we're lucky, I may need to leave the team."

It's easy to work in enough detail about your character's intimate life (or lack thereof) without being too explicit.

And Beyond . . .

Unless everyone is *really* comfortable with each other, aspects beyond this are probably best reserved for one-on-one sessions with the GM, journals, correspondence, or even stories (to be shared with the group, the GM, or no one!). This can be especially useful if you're trying to do sensitive or psychologically complex storylines . . . or stories that don't involve the group much. Why does your character decide to (or not to) cheat on a spouse, despite the problems at home? Can and how does your character eventually work through the trauma of an early experience? What does your character *really* want?

Again, these can be as explicit or as tame as you and whoever you're sharing it with is comfortable. (If you're writing

for yourself, go to town!)

Of course, you don't need to do anything with any of this advice. One of my friends pointed out, "I don't like my characters having a more exciting romantic life than *I* am." While I suspect this may be a common view, this immediately made me wonder how many of our *players* have lives filled with as much orc-killing, globe-trotting, laser-flinging, and world-saving as the standard character. For many campaigns, it seems logical to include possibly more realistic and in-depth explorations of intimate matters.

Many think of our genre as fantasy roleplaying. Of course, "roleplaying" has as many definitions and variations as "fantasy" . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Tooniversal Tour Guide**, p. 39.*

(Four stars):

" . . . **Favored Professions Through The Ages:**

Tax collector

Brigand captain

Food taster

Shift foreman

Mine pit boss

Teamster . . ."

. . ."

We Are For The Dark: *Antony and Cleopatra*

"I am dying, Egypt, dying:

Give me some wine, and let me speak a little."

-- William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, IV:xv:41-42

Ah, love. Life and death both seem defined by it and destroyed by it, at least in the [magical world of Shakespeare's romances](#). Last Valentine's Day we looked at the combustive astrology of [Romeo and Juliet](#): this year, we witness the last great love story of the pagan gods played out in Egypt. John Dryden called it a tale of "the world well lost," but what lost world has Shakespeare revived for the gaze of his dramaturgical magic? Give us some wine, and let us see of what *Antony and Cleopatra* speak.

"She shall be buried by her Antony:

No grave upon the earth shall clip in it

A pair so famous. High events as these

Strike those that make them; and their story is

No less in pity than his glory which

Brought them to be lamented."

-- William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, V:ii:359-364

Like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra* is a story of love and suicide, and like its youthful twin, it has only one plot, the love story of the title. Antony and Cleopatra begin the play in Egypt, delighted in each others' charms, but messengers from Rome break up the happy couple with the news that Antony's wife Fulvia has broken the peace and made war against Octavius in Italy. Antony must leave Cleopatra, return to Italy, and patch things up with his co-ruler; to cement their alliance, Antony agrees to marry Octavius' sister Octavia (Fulvia being conveniently dead in the battle). Told of Antony's marriage, Cleopatra rages, and threatens to kill the messenger, only placated when told of Octavia's homely appearance. During an "Alexandrian feast" on a galley, Antony and Octavius bring Pompey (the son of the great general) into their alliance, but Octavius eventually attacks Pompey. While Octavia is on a peace mission to Octavius, Antony leaves her to return to Cleopatra and Egypt.

Octavius continues his campaign, bringing the war to Antony's province of Greece; Antony would be wiser to face Octavius on land, but Cleopatra persuades him to fight at sea. When her ships desert the battle, he too flees, dooming his men, but forgives Cleopatra her treachery. Octavius follows him to Egypt for another battle, where again the Egyptian forces betray Antony. Antony finally decides to leave Cleopatra, but she sends him false word of her death and he is again overcome by love. He tries, but fails, to kill himself, and makes his way to Cleopatra's monument, where she hauls him up to her for a final kiss and Antony's death. Now desperate to avoid becoming a pawn in Octavius' triumph, and to join Antony in death, Cleopatra has a clown bring her a poison asp in a bowl of figs, and kills herself with its bite. Octavius, now master of the world, leaves Antony and Cleopatra buried together in her monument.

"Nay, 'tis most certain, Iras: saucy lictors

Will catch at us, like strumpets; and scald rhymers

Ballad us out o' tune: the quick comedians

Extemporally will stage us, and present

Our Alexandrian revels; Antony

Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see

Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness

I' the posture of a whore."

-- William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, V:ii:212-219

Shakespeare returned to Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* for the story here, which he probably read in Thomas North's 1579 translation. (A copy of Plutarch from Ferdinando Strange's library was loaned to one "Wilhelmi" by his sister during this period.) The bulk of the play, although it condenses some events, essentially follows Plutarch,

and history; Shakespeare may also have borrowed some pieces of Samuel Daniel's 1594 *Tragedie of Cleopatra* and Robert Garnier's 1578 *Marc-Antoine*, performing his usual magic upon their generally forgettable contents.

More interesting is the question of the origin of Shakespeare's character, Cleopatra, as distinct from the Kleopatra VII of history. The part is easily the best female part in Shakespeare, and has defeated actresses of all calibers. Even the legendary Sarah Siddons refused to essay the part. Shakespeare makes her a legend striding the earth, all passions given form and personified; as Cleopatra says, "I am fire and air; my other elements, I give to baser life." Interestingly, Shakespeare may well have been writing his latter sonnets -- the ones concerning a "Dark Lady" -- at the same time (sometime between 1605 and 1607, depending on the theory) that he was composing *Antony and Cleopatra*. It's worth noting that he also describes Cleopatra explicitly as "tawny"; in other words, a second Dark Lady worth dying for.

*"She in the habiliments of the goddess Isis
That day appear'd; and oft before gave audience,
As 'tis reported, so."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, III:vi:17-19

To Shakespeare's audience, of course, a "gipsy" who hails from Egypt, does mysterious business with snakes, and ensnares a Roman general to the destruction of his fortunes must be practicing "witchcraft joined with beauty," an insinuation that Pompey and other scandalized Romans repeat in the play. Shakespeare's own Dark Lady remains unknown, although his description in Sonnet 130, of a "dun" woman with no color in even her lips, reeking breath, and wiry hair, also resembles the classical depiction of a witch. Or, of course, of a vampire; and it is intriguing that Cleopatra even in death "looks like sleep, as she would catch another Antony." Themes of sleep and renewal recur with Cleopatra, of whom "age cannot wither, nor custom stale her infinite variety." Could she, the "serpent of old Nile," who sleeps giving suckle to a serpent, have been a lamia herself, an Eastern monster intent on wooing Antony into her fell vampiric clutches?

If so, Antony certainly goes along with it. His dalliance with Cleopatra (like so much Shakespearean magic) slows and distorts time, a creepily vampiric "sleep and feeding" creating a "Lethe'd dullness" or the "oblivion" of [mandragora](#). He has, in short, been won to the (magical, timeless) East of Egypt as opposed to the (measured, time-bound) West of Rome. Antony even attempts to inveigle Octavius and the rest into dancing "the Egyptian Bacchanals" (sacred dances of Osiris as [Dionysos](#)), and sings a hymn to Bacchus during the "Alexandrian feast" on board Pompey's galley (after drunkenly alluding to the crocodile, that beast of alchemical import). Even cold Octavius almost succumbs to the sorcery, leaving just in time, as "the wild disguise hath almost antickt us all."

*"Thy daemon, that's thy spirit which keeps thee, is
Noble, courageous high, unmatchable,
Where Caesar's is not; but, near him, thy angel
Becomes a fear, as being o'erpower'd: therefore
Make space enough between you.."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, II:iii:19-23

Octavius has only his "luck" to oppose Antony's magickal daemon, which all in the play identify as Hercules (who, as the Gallic Ogmios, was also a god of magic, and whose death and resurrection parallel both Osiris and Dionysos). In an extraordinary sequence in Act IV, Scene iii, the soldiers in Antony's camp hear "music i' the air" and "under the earth" which they somehow know means that "the god Hercules, whom Antony loved, now leaves him." The moving music, again, conveys Dionysos as much as Hercules. Antony realizes his daemon/god has left him and, upon Egypt's second betrayal, offers up Cleopatra for Hercules/Dionysos' return to possession: "with those hands that graspt the heaviest club, subdue my worthiest self." Too little, too late; Antony remains caught between Roman sword and Egyptian snake, both Mars and Gorgon (as Cleopatra names him).

Cleopatra, meanwhile, is Isis -- appearing in the goddess' "habiliments," and repeatedly taking on the Queen of Beauty's incarnation. Isis is associated with the sea; so Cleopatra forces the sea-fight at Actium. Even her seduction of Antony happens on a barge, while "o'er-picturing Venus," the sea-born Roman equivalent of Isis. Cleopatra's whole metier is the water; she wishes the Nile to half-drown Egypt and made "a cistern for scaled snakes," and to "Melt

Egypt into Nile!" Under her sway, Antony, too, does not keep "his square" but embraces the chaotic, timeless sea: "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch of ranged empire fall!" He would make cities "o'er green Neptune's back," and the two of them become "a race of heaven."

*"I dreamt there was an Emperor Anthony --
O, such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man! . . .
His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted
The little O o' th' earth . . .
His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm
Crested the world; his voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres - and that to friends --
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, V:ii:76-88

And indeed the two are a race of heaven; whether brought from the secret knowledge of the Reptoid vampires or learned from Dionysos in Egypt, Cleopatra has transformed herself into Venus and Antony into Mars. Their conjunction is of cosmic import -- Shakespeare uses the word "world" 42 times in the play, more than double his normal frequency. This is a tale of giants, Antony is the "demi-Atlas" who can "speak as loud as Mars," while Cleopatra's "winds and waters" are not mere "sighs and tears" but "greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report," in other words, cosmically disastrous phenomena from outside measurement and history. Antony's struggle with Octavius is one of "stars, unreconcilable"; two suns competing for the same world (which may refer either to Kepler's Supernova of 1604 or Halley's Comet in 1607, both of which would have seemed sunlike to Shakespeare). At Antony's death "the star is fall'n," and "time is at his period" -- in Cleopatra's words, the "pole is fall'n", in a bit of Velikovskian [pole-shifting](#) synchronism. Time has stopped for the battle, with stars "empty left their orbs" and "our Terrene moon is now eclipsed, and it portends alone the fall of Antony."

With this play, Shakespeare seems to be as torn as Antony himself. As a good Briton, he must perforce support Rome, especially as the [death of the gods](#) (as Plutarch also noted) gives way to the "age of universal peace." Even his magickal sponsors would have blanched at the need to destroy measurement and unleash chaos, even to access the divine dimension on the other side of Lethe's shore. But still, he cannot pull away from the Dark Lady Cleopatra, cannot resist her crocodile tears or her serpentine gaze. He is trapped giving a warning he does not mean against a danger that he craves -- like Antony, he "cannot hold this visible shape". He venerates, yet deprecates, the fallen gods of the past, in this play seemingly drawn from (and perhaps written at the behest of) the desires of his own Dark Lady. Who gazed into Shakespeare's eyes and inspired this romantic [reality quake](#), seeking the destruction of the world for love? And upon whom will her eye fall next? Happy Valentine's Day.

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Cupid's Arrows

A Holiday Adventure for *In Nomine*

by Elizabeth McCoy

Prologue

Once upon a time, there was an ethereal god called Eros -- or Cupid -- who had powers of love, lust, and infatuation . . . Unfortunately for him, he did not survive the Purity Crusade that the Archangel Uriel instigated to rid the Earth and dreamlands of the ethereal spirits.

In time, another Cupid arose from the myths and dreams that the first had left behind. An arrogant heir, he claimed to be the original, probably even believing it himself.

But ethereal spirits aren't automatically unique; the stuff of dreams can coalesce again. Or, in other words, he's not the only Cupid.

The Protagonists Meet

With Valentine's day nearing, another Cupid has grown fat on the general Essence . . . Literally fat, for it has the form of the traditional plump, diapered, "cherubic" baby with little wings and an adorable bow and arrow. And, drawn to achieve its purpose in life -- making people fall in love -- it's managed to sneak down to Earth. Now it's going around in a semi-visible, gaseous form akin to that of the Kyriotes of the Wind (or Shedim of Theft), shooting people with the Arrows of Luv.

One of its very first targets, unbeknownst to anyone, was the demon Irshe, Balsraph of Lust. Balsraph *Captain* of Lust. With 12 Forces. And, theoretically, a will of iron.

However, will of iron or not, Irshe was hit from behind by one of Cupid's semi-tangible heart-tipped arrows -- and when he looked up, he saw a young woman passing him on the sidewalk. Instantly, the Balsraph was smitten by the woman (named Virginia Cross), and instantly, dissonant for the caring that suddenly suffused his selfish soul. Oops.

The Plot Thickens

Irshe initially trailed the woman to her apartment building, then fled, confused by the emotions and dissonance within him. After a week where No One Else Will Do for his desires (racking up more dissonance, too, which doesn't usually happen), he's decided that he needs to have the woman captured and brought to him.

What he doesn't know is that, while he was stalking the woman, he was spotted by a Malakite of Creation. The Virtue attempted a raid on Irshe's place of business (the typical brothel-masquerading-as-a-nightclub that many Andrealphans aspire to), and was shot by one of the guards. Without a spare vessel, the angel has had to find some friends to carry out her plans. Unaware of the ethereal nature of the demon's "conversion," she's sure that the Balsraph is redeemable! After all, he's in love with a human, right?

What *neither* of them know is that Virginia Cross is a "white sorcerer" and Soldier of God. Her contact is an angel of Judgment in the next town over. Her current goal is to track down a semi-substantial ethereal which she caught a glimpse of on the city street, shooting people with a little bow and arrow.

Enter the Players

Demons

- The group is, for some reason, under Irshe's control enough that he can "persuade" them to go after the woman he so desires. He can draw them a good picture and point them at her apartment building, though he doesn't know which apartment she's in.
- The PCs are enemies of Irshe -- who has been acting rather strange and erratic. One might even think he was dissonant! Clearly, when a few of Irshe's minions are sent on a mission in the dead of night, something interesting is going down. Perhaps he'd pay ransom for this woman he's sent his people after?
- Naturally, undercover Servitors of the Game could combine both of the above, as could members of Lust's secret police.

Angels

- Recruited by the Malakite -- or someone the Malakite talked to -- the characters have a drawing of the Balsraph in question, an address where he can be found, and a suggestion that the Balsraph might be happier if hauled off to the nearest angelic Tether. Mayhem can be perpetrated upon any other demons at the brothel, of course.
- Virginia has noticed that she's being watched (by Irshe's minions, who are trying to figure out which apartment to break into), and called her contact, who has, in turn, leaned on any local angels to check things out. (You may not be able to get a Servitor of Dominic to look the other way -- but it can be nicer to have them happy with you instead of dropping a triad on your doorstep every month because you were being "suspiciously selfish" . . .)

Anyone

- A bunch of demons are sneaking around, trying to stalk some woman. A group of angels are sneaking around, trying to stalk the demons. (If need-be, the Malakite isn't dead (yet) and is the one doing the stalking in this scenario.) The mystery of this cats-and-mice game could involve mundane authorities or celestials who aren't aware of what's going on.
- After the matter with Virginia and Irshe is settled, one way or another, there's still this little Cupid to catch. By this time, they may have learned that its arrows were able to inspire demonic dissonance! Whether the PCs are demons who want to remove some rivals, or angels who think dissonant demons are a good idea, little Cupid is likely to become a hot property. For those with the *Liber Servitorum*, the older Cupid might show up, gunning (arrowing?) for the new interloper. (And for the Lilim in the audience: how much would people bid for it? How much would it bid to be protected?)

A Potential Script

Here is one of the ways that the scenario could play out; insert the player-characters at any appropriate point.

- Cupid shoots Irshe, who trails Virginia to her apartment. Virginia has spotted Cupid, and is preparing a ritual to capture it. The Malakite spots Irshe, spots that Irshe is dissonantly infatuated with a human, and trails *him* to his club.
- The Malakite gets herself shot, trying to break into the club. Starts talking to associates, to get a group together to kidnap the Balsraph.
- Irshe, dissonant, assigns a group of minions to kidnap Virginia "quietly."
- Virginia, noticing that she is apparently being watched, calls *her* contact. She will be assigned either player-characters, or an out-of-town Cherub as a body-guard.
- It all comes together: the Malakite's team (with Malakite, if no PCs there) stalks Irshe's team, who are stalking Virginia, who has recently gotten a Cherub bodyguard. When the demons make their move, the angels will make *theirs* (to thwart them and capture someone for interrogation), and the bodyguard -- not having any way of knowing who's who or what -- will be generally bashing anyone in sight except his attuned (that being Virginia).

- Even more confusion can be added with Little Cupid happening into the area and seeing a lot of Lust demon targets. Even *more* mayhem will ensue if the Game Master has the Liber Servitorum, and sends the elder Cupid to Earth to hunt down the Little Cupid as a competitor for Essence. Arrows flying everywhere, masked demons, angels throwing Deadly Ninja Greeting Cards . . .
- The demonic team will try to escape, with Virginia if they can get away with her in the confusion.
- The angelic team will try to follow them, so they can capture Irshe, at the club. (Or, if they can subdue the demons, try to sneak in via the "we're just captives" method.) If they can get Irshe, they'll zip out of town for a friendly-to-Creation Tether; any demons wanting to get the Captain of Lust back will have to engage in a car chase . . .
- Virginia's Cherub will do the obvious: protect Virginia, rescue her if need be.
- After the Loose Ends (below) are tied up, or put off (such as by thwarting Virginia's kidnapping, but not capturing Irshe in return), the Great Cupid Chase is likely to be on. Virginia isn't *quite* good enough to summon Cupid yet . . .

Loose Ends

If Irshe succeeds in capturing Virginia, his first inclination will be to ravish her and have done with it. Unless the GM wants a very dark setting, he's not going to be able to go through with it; the Greeting Card Cupid's influence is just too pure. He will imprison her unharmed while he tries to figure out what to do, keeping her under close guard -- usually personal guard -- in one of the basement rooms in his club.

If Irshe is brought to a friendly Tether, he'll be in denial of his selfless twinges. Exposure to Virginia, however, will cause him to run through the Merciful Discord, and his next Discord will be Selfless. (See the *Infernal Player's Guide*; essentially, a serious case of being *unable* to be demonically selfish.) It's just a matter of time.

And what does Virginia think of all this? She doesn't like being stalked. She won't be thrilled at being kidnapped. She'll agree to help talk a Balsraph into redemption, though, no matter what her personal opinions are. (If captured, she'll be trying to talk to him about "going bright," which will not be helping Irshe's mental state any.) If Irshe does a suitably angstful attraction-confusion-protection act (which is no act) around her, she'll begin to feel sympathetic. If he redeems, she'd welcome a proper sort of courtship; she finds the typical Seraphic vessel attractive, and isn't put off by snakes.

A Far-Out Loose End

Anyone who *kills* Virginia will have Irshe, the Cherub, and probably the angelic team on their tails. Ironically, Irshe will be even more easily persuaded into a redemptive state of mind: Virginia has not achieved either fate or destiny, and will likely be reincarnated; there is a Destiny attunement (in *Superiors 3*) which allows snippets of past lives to be revealed. A Servitor of Destiny would have an easier time of finding his True Love than a Balsraph of Lust.

Non-Player Characters

Irshe, Balsraph Captain of Lust

Irshe is normally a reptilian, cold, ruthless demon. He earned his Knighthood by careful, diligent work -- not a quick roll in the sheets with an angel -- and is proud of his efforts. This sudden rush of emotion is horribly foreign to him; besides being dissonant, he's coming to *enjoy* these strange feelings. They make him feel . . . bubbly. Lighter. More pleased with simple acts such as breathing or admiring a sunset.

This enjoyment, sensibly, frightens him. He is hoping that once he has satisfied his lusts with this strangely compelling human, he'll go back to normal. But as every day goes by, part of him hopes more and more that he *won't* go back to normal.

(There are at least three options here: Cupid's Arrow sparked some latent spark of Good in the Balseph; it was a Divine Intervention; or this Cupid has a subtle power that can cause demons to have selfless emotions. Which is the truth is up to the GM to decide; true or not, the last *possibility* is probably enough to get angels and demons alike chasing after Cupid!)

For the Lilim and Malakim . . . Need/6 (Get Virginia!), Need/3 (Don't let anyone find out he's Discordant), Need/2 (A new waitress/hooker for his club). Most honorable deed: Recruiting a new-Fallen Habbalite to Lust. Most dishonorable deed: Has fallen in love, recently. Last year's three most honorable and dishonorable deeds: insisted one of his employees get an abortion, healed three new employees of STDs, trained a rival's Soldier to be loyal to *Irshe* (honorable); let a Servitor of Fleurity do deals in his establishment, had a would-be "protection racket" ringleader killed, fell in love (dishonorable).

Virginia Cross, white sorcerer and Soldier of God

One of the rarest of the rare, a sorcerer in service to Heaven, Virginia's life has been wrapped up with celestials for over a decade. When her parents died in a car crash, her grandfather turned to sorcery and necromancy to bring back his beloved daughter -- and, unfortunately for him, the Demon of Sorcery answered his pleas. By age 10, Virginia was slated as a sacrifice in a dark ritual, and only saved by angelic intervention. Her grandfather, however, suicided rather than be thwarted by angels with flaming swords.

This left the rescuing angels with the sticky problem of an orphaned mortal who was already conversant with sorcery -- and who needed counseling lest she follow in her grandfather's madness. The final solution was for Virginia to be adopted by a Soldier across the country; since celestials are adept at forging Roles for themselves, giving a little human girl a new life was easy enough. To a certain amount of angelic dismay, she insisted on learning more sorcery; one of the rare "white sorcerers" was brought in to Initiate her (in a ritual involving prayer, fasting, and churchly vigils) lest she attempt it on her own. (When a 13-year-old announces that she *will* learn sorcery, and the Symphony confirms it, a wise Seraph finds a way to make it happen without the risk of using a Hell-tainted, soul-damning ritual.)

She's currently a clerk in an occult bookstore, taking law classes, and trapping or banishing the occasional ethereal who strays through. She's always on the lookout for "dark sorcerers," and prefers to question the ethereal spirits she captures. Much to the discomfit of her angelic contact, Virginia is studying the Summoning rituals. She doesn't intend to use them without angelic supervision, but she does dream of calling up the demons who abetted her grandfather's delusions -- into a room full of Malakim . . .

(Virginia's former last name -- as Mercurians may find out -- was Garcia, and her dark hair and eyes reflect this.)

For Lilim, Malakim, and those with Fated Future and Divine Destiny: Virginia's destiny is to participate in precedent-causing legal cases which will aid in freedom of religion. Her fate is to achieve political office by unfair means. Her most honorable deed was to turn over an ethereal to angels, instead of letting it serve her as it bribed. Her most dishonorable deed was allowing her grandfather to turn his knife upon himself, when she believes she could have stopped him.

In the last year, her three honorable and dishonorable are: worked on building a house for a needy family, adopted two adult cats from the local humane society, and studied for all her most recent finals instead of going to the movies (honorable); is studying summoning rituals when she knows it will bother her family, sold someone an occult book she didn't trust because "the customer is always right," photocopied large chunks of a book in the library.

Her current major Needs: Find the ethereal she spotted (Need/4), Find out if she's really being stalked (Need/3), Get an expensive textbook for classes (Need/1), Get revenge on certain demons of Fate (Need/6).

Little Cupid, young ethereal spirit

Cupid -- this Cupid -- is not overly bright, nor overly big, nor overly anything else except intent upon fulfilling his

purpose in creation: making people fall in love. He can sense, vaguely, people who have no love in their lives, and has a deep urge to shoot them with one of his arrows. Being semi-visible (he requires a Perception roll to see) and possessed of *some* survival instinct, he hides a lot. While he can't go through walls, he is able to slip through small cracks that are technically too small for him -- he's a bit "cartoony" that way.

Cupid's Arrows: These are less relics than pieces of the ethereal Cupid himself, which he manufactures (at the cost of 1 Essence per arrow). They vanish shortly after they've been taken from their little quiver, or immediately after they hit someone. The victim makes a Will roll; if it's failed, treat as a successful Ethereal Song of Attraction, focused on the first person of the appropriate gender the victim sees. The check digit of the "Song" is the check digit of the failed Will roll. If the Will roll succeeds, then there's merely a faint yearning sensation associated with the first-sighted potential True Love. (Alternatively, GMs may decide that if the victim sees someone "appropriate" (by the GM's standards), the victim *really* falls in love!)

Needs and Deeds: Need/1 (shoot someone who needs love), Need/2 (don't get caught), Need/3 (don't get killed).
Honorable deeds: Shooting people who need love! **Dishonorable deeds:** Missing who's shot at.

Statistics

In Nomine Statistics

Note that all characters have a "native" language/3 of English; if setting the adventure in a different locale, change the native language appropriately.

IRSHE

Balseraph Captain of Lust

Corporeal Forces - 4 Strength 9 Agility 7
Ethereal Forces - 3 Intelligence 7 Precision 5
Celestial Forces - 5 Will 11 Perception 9

Vessel: Human male/3, Charisma +1 (Sex Appeal)

Role: Erwin "Sean" St.-John, Club Owner/3, Status/3

Skills: Artistry/2 (Drawing), Detect Lies/1, Driving/1, Emote/2, Languages (English/3, Spanish/1, French/1), Ranged Weapon/1 (Pistol), Savoir-Faire/2, Seduction/4, Singing/1

Attunements: Balseraph of Lust, Dark Desire, Captain of Diabolical Delight

Discord: Merciful/2 (and he may have a few notes of dissonance as well)

VIRGINIA CROSS

White Sorcerer and Soldier of God

Corporeal Forces - 1 Strength 2 Agility 2
Ethereal Forces - 2 Intelligence 5 Precision 3
Celestial Forces - 3 Will 7 Perception 5

Status: 2 (Student)

Skills: Computer Operation/1, Detect Lies/1, Driving/1, Knowledge (Law/3, Local Area/3, Occult/2, Retail Sales/1), Languages (English/3, Spanish/2, Hebrew/1, Latin/1, Greek/1)

Sorcerous Skills and Rituals: Banishment/2 (Banish ritual), Command/2 (Command Minor Ethereal Sprit), Exorcism/2 (Exorcise, Exorcise Ghost), Focus/1 (Symphonic Awakening, Protective Ward), Summon/1 (Summon Demonling).

Attunements: Sorcery

(Note that Virginia's skills include the "human defaults" recommended in the *Corporeal Player's Guide* -- Knowledge/3 (Local Area), Knowledge/3 (profession), Knowledge/1 (hobby), Driving/1, and Swimming/1, as well as a native Language/3.)

LITTLE CUPID

Ethereal Spirit

Corporeal Forces - 1 Strength 1 Agility 3
Ethereal Forces - 3 Intelligence 3 Precision 9
Celestial Forces - 1 Will 2 Perception 2

Vessel: Semi-substantial winged baby/2

Skills: Ranged Weapon/4 (Bow), Move Silently/4

"Attunements": Kyriotate of the Wind* (always on); See the Loveless; Cause Love.

**(Cupid doesn't really have a Wind attunement, but its natural ability is virtually identical.)*

GURPS Statistics

(*GURPS* versions of the characters have been "normalized" from their conversion values, so that they will fit better with typical *GURPS In Nomine* characters.)

IRSHE

Balseraph Captain of Lust

ST 18, DX 16, IQ 16, HT 16

Advantages: Power Investiture (Corporeal: 4, Ethereal: 3, Celestial: 5), Dark Desire, Role +3, Strong Will +1, Celestial Rank 2 (Captain of Lust), Balseraph of Lust

Disadvantages: Cannot Kill, Discord (linked to Cannot Kill), Jealousy, Overconfidence, Servitor of Lust (includes Duty and Dissonance Condition).

Quirks: Attempts to appear unfazable, Sticks to hard work instead of flashy stunts, to gain recognition; Likes dancing.

Skills: Acting-15 [1], Artist-14 [1], Carousing-15 [1/2], Dancing-14 [1/2], Detect Lies-13 [1/2], Diplomacy-13 [1/2], Driving (Car)-14 [1/2], Erotic Art-15 [2], Guns (Pistol)-17 [1/2], Interrogation-14 [1/2], Language: English-16 [-], Language: French-14 [1/2], Language: Spanish-14 [1/2], Savoir-Faire-15 [1/2], Sex Appeal-17 [4], Singing-15 [1/2]

Songs: Attraction (Ethereal)-12 [2], Healing (Corporeal)-14 [4], Numinous Corpus: Wings-12 [1], Numinous Corpus: Ornamental-17 [16].

(The Ornamental Numinous Corpus is one suited to Lust, and left to the imagination of the GM.)

VIRGINIA CROSS

White Sorcerer and Soldier of God

ST 8, DX 9, IQ 13, HT 10

Advantages: Essence Control +6, Power Investiture (Sorcery), Strong Will +4

Disadvantages: Cannot Harm Innocents, Overconfidence, Secret (Sorcerer), Stubbornness

Quirks: Likes dancing, though she's no good at it; Enjoys SF&F movies, even the bad ones; Ogles (discreetly) tall men.

Skills: Area Knowledge (local)-14 [2], Computer Operation/TL/7-12 [1/2], Detect Lies-10 [1/2], Driving (Car)-11 [8], First Aid/TL7-12 [1/2], Law-12 [2], Merchant-11 [1/2], Occultism-13 [2], Research-12 [1], Scrounging-12 [1/2]

Sorcerous Rituals: Banish-12 [2], Command Minor Ethereal-12 [2], Exorcise-12 [2], Exorcise Ghost-12 [2], Symphonic Awakening-11 [1], Protective Ward-11 [1], Summon Demonling-10* [1] (* *Summon Demonling is at an additional -1 because she doesn't know the prerequisite ritual of Summon Minor Ethereal.*)

LITTLE CUPID

Ethereal Spirit

ST 4, DX 12, IQ 8, HT 4

Advantages: Kyriotate of the Wind (Always On), Symphonic Knowledge (Loveless), Symphonic Influence (Cause Love). (See *In Nomine* stats note about the "Kyriotate of the Wind" advantage.)

Disadvantages: Compulsive Behavior: Make the Loveless fall in Love, Cowardice, Reduced Alertness -1, Shyness (mild), Weak Will -1.

Skills: Bow-14 [16], Stealth-14 [8]

Magic Ingredients Revisited

Spell Ingredients for *GURPS*

by Matt Riggsby

"I must have something to work on!"

--Gandalf the Grey

GURPS Magic notes briefly that magicians traditionally keep spell ingredients, batches of odds and ends for use in casting spells (sidebar, p. M9). For the sake of convenience, it further assumes that, under usual circumstances, magicians have access to whatever they need. If magicians get out of hand, GMs can hit them with a sudden shortage of virgin's blood, Nixon masks, or what-have-you in order to restore game balance. However, it seems inelegant to arbitrarily announce that there is a sudden shortage of something a formerly powerful character didn't know he needed in the first place. GMs intending to make spell ingredients an important element in their campaigns, or those who simply want to add some color to the basic magic system, can use these rules to flesh out the brief mention of magic ingredients and fill magicians' pouches with strange and rare substances.

Which Ingredients?

Rather than assigning specific components to each spell (for the most part), this system allows spell casters a certain amount of flexibility.

Each college has a list of magic ingredients, from which the caster can choose as he casts his spell. In general, the number of ingredients a spell needs depends on its prerequisites. To find the number of ingredients necessary to cast a given spell, take the number of prerequisite spells it needs, divide by two, and round up. A spell without prerequisite spells needs no ingredients, a spell with one or two prerequisites needs one ingredient, and so on. The spell prerequisite charts in *GURPS Grimoire* are extremely useful here. There are a few exceptions for specific spells. For example, Seek spells all use forked sticks to the exclusion of all other ingredients.

The number of prerequisite spells is calculated by the total number of spells necessary for the individual caster to learn the spell; advantages and non-spell skills do not count. For example, Flame Jet has four prerequisites for every spellcaster, since it takes Create Fire and Shape Fire, which in turn require Seek Fire and Ignite Fire. On the other hand, Beast Soother can take either the Persuasion spell or the Animal Empathy advantage as a prerequisite. If the caster has Animal Empathy, he needs no prerequisite spells, and therefore needs no ingredients. Experienced magicians also need fewer ingredients. Reduce the number of ingredients a spell needs by one for every three full points of skill over twelve. A magician would need one less ingredient if he knows a spell at 15, two less at 18, and so on.

Using Ingredients

Using ingredients in spellcasting is simply a matter of flourishing an object or scattering a pinch of dust as appropriate to the ingredient.

Using an ingredient does not by itself add to casting time, but it may take a moment for an unprepared spellcaster to dig the necessary ingredients out of his pouch. Treat this as a Ready maneuver which may be performed while the caster is concentrating on the spell; the GM may allow a Fast-Ready: Spell Ingredient skill. If the ingredients are worn as jewelry or clothing, they are considered ready for use in spellcasting. Items may serve as multiple ingredients. For example, if a wizard needs iron, jade, and a ring to cast a spell, an iron ring set with jade may count as three ingredients. Unless specifically stated, spell ingredients do not need special preparation or enchantment. If a spell needs a stone as an ingredient, the caster may pick up any rock which comes to hand and use it immediately. He could

even lay a hand on a nearby boulder or cliff-side.

Materials fall into two types: durable and expendable. Expendable materials include plants (usually ground into powder for convenience), dusts, and liquids. They are scattered or poured out in "pinches," twenty pinches to an ounce, and are lost once they are used even if the spell fails. For convenience, a caster may prepare "spell masalas," mixes of ingredients. The total number of pinches of ingredients required is used in a casting. For example, a necromancer might prepare a mix of dried blood and graveyard dust. If he needs two ingredients to cast a spell, he can use a two-pinch handful of the mixture rather than have to dig through his bag to get one pinch of blood and another of dust.

Durable materials include stones, metals, cloths, and any other more-or-less solid object. Durable materials are not necessarily destroyed in casting. They are lost only if the caster rolls a critical failure on his skill roll. However, if the caster rolls a critical failure, all objects used as ingredients for the spell are destroyed in their entirety (the ring and stone shatter, the boots fall apart and the leather turns to dust, etc.), even if the objects have components which were not used in the spell. For example, if the jade-set iron ring had a ruby and a diamond set in it as well, the ring and all three gems would be destroyed. Very large objects react to critical failures somewhat differently. If the object in question has greater weight, mass, or volume than the wizard himself, it is not destroyed on a critical failure. Instead, there is a magical backlash which does 2d damage to the caster; armor offers no protection. Some spells may take certain environmental conditions in place of ingredients (for example, being in a high place counts towards the total ingredients for Air spells). Those conditions are likewise not affected by a critical failure on the spell roll.

Spellcasting Without Materials

The GM should decide what the effects of spellcasting without materials are in the campaign world. The greater effect, the more important they will be in the game world. Here are some suggested levels of effect:

- **Trivial:** The caster is at -1 to skill if he does not have all ingredients.
- **Annoyance:** The caster is at -1 to skill for every ingredient he is short.
- **Severe Impediment:** Spellcasters who cannot use the full number of ingredients are at half skill.
- **Crippling:** Spells may not be cast without proper ingredients.

Ingredients List

Each college of spells in *GURPS Magic* is listed below with materials that may be used to cast its spells. Special requirements for individual spells are listed within the college the spell belongs to. This is, of course, only a sample list, and the GM may alter and expand the lists as desired to fit the tone of the campaign. This list provides a fairly generic mix of precious stones and metals, herbs, spices, and specialized objects, but a GM may want to emphasize the use of [spices](#), gems, or parts of magical animals (dragon's scales, unicorn horns). High-tech wizards may employ rare isotopes, the aforementioned Nixon masks, and [office supplies](#) in their spells. However, in order to keep some level of control, it is recommended that you not provide more than ten to twelve ingredients for any one college.

Animal

Jasper, violets, obsidian, amber, a silver ring, a flute, a rattle, a whip, a bone or horn wand. Animal spells may also use a part of an animal of the appropriate type (for example, a wolf's paw or blood for a spell to be cast on a wolf), which counts as two ingredients. The heart of an appropriate animal counts as three ingredients. Rider and Possession spells may use a polished sphere of any red stone in place of all other ingredients. Shapeshifting spells may use a full hide of an appropriate animal or enough ointment made from the animal's blood and fat to cover the subject from head to toe in place of all other ingredients.

Body Control

Onyx, orchid, pepper, dried gum, blood from an intelligent creature, jade, ivory, malachite, a rattle, a wand made from

an organic material. "Harmful" body control spells such as Strike Dumb, Pain, and so on may use soot, poisons, an inscribed bone from a sentient being, or a skull, which count as two ingredients. "Helpful" body control spells may use diamond or a metal wrist-band or necklace, which count as two ingredients. Roundabout may simply use a silver needle or an arrow in place of all other ingredients. For spells cast on others, anything once part of the subject's body, such as hair, blood, or sweat, counts as two ingredients.

Communication and Empathy

Poppy, the eye or ear of any animal, a sculpture of a head, quartz, diamond, amber, a lens, a bell, or a hollow tube. A transparent glass sphere at least three inches in diameter counts as two ingredients. All Communication and Empathy spells except Possession and any spell taking Possession as a prerequisite may be performed with only a polished, flawless quartz or other transparent mineral sphere at least three inches in diameter. For other spells, such a sphere counts as three ingredients. At the GMs option, psychoactive substances may be used as ingredients.

Elemental

All Seek spells, regardless of college, may use a two-pronged object (forked stick, silver fork, chicken wishbone, etc.) or a wooden or metal needle hanging from a string instead of any other ingredients.

Elemental (Air)

A fan, a feather, silk, colored streamers, a hollow tube, any blade, a silver wand, diamond, aquamarine, quartz, a horn or flute, a wind stronger than 4 mph. Being on a mountain top or in a fully exposed position atop a very tall building (at least 100 feet) counts as one ingredient, or two for particularly high and open locations or being in flight (or simply falling).

Elemental (Earth)

Every metal, stone, and ore counts as a separate ingredient. Being underground counts as an ingredient, and being in a natural cave (rather than an excavation or basement) counts as two.

Elemental (Fire)

Pepper, amber, topaz, gold, iron, bronze, copper, an open flame. Ruby and any part of a salamander or large reptile count as two ingredients. Casting in very close proximity to a large fire, such as a building or forest fire, or a volcano counts as two ingredients, although it may be difficult or dangerous to cast from such locations.

Elemental (Water)

Any part of an aquatic or amphibious animal, aquamarine, turquoise, water, silver, a ring, a cup or bowl, a green, blue, or white cloth. Casting while in a boat (on the water, not on dry land!) or swimming counts as an ingredient, while full immersion during the entire casting counts as two.

Enchantment

Each tool incorporating a gem, precious metal, or other rare substance counts as a separate ingredient; miniature replicas are equally effective. Enchantment uses the same type and number of ingredients as the underlying spell plus one tool as for other ingredients in the college.

Food

Fire, a wooden box, a wand or staff. Each spice counts as a separate ingredient. A large pot or kettle counts as two, a stove, oven or fireplace counts as three.

Healing

Oil (any oil suitable for cooking or eating, not petroleum), incense, pure water, gold, amber, sage, mandrake, poppy, white cloth.

Illusion and Creation

Smoke, wine, a silk flag, opal, clay or sand, a colored wand or staff, each different dye or brightly colored disk counts as a separate ingredient up to four ingredients.

Knowledge

Amethyst, patchouli, mistletoe, myrrh, tea leaves, a pen, the eye, ear, or tongue of an intelligent creature, a garment embroidered with mystical symbols. Knowledge spells may use a crystal sphere as for Communication and Empathy spells.

Light and Darkness

For light-producing or vision-enhancing spells: a lens, a hollow tube, silver, a mirror or polished metal object, diamond, quartz, a mask or veil. For dark-producing or vision-obscuring spells: soot, sable, mud or dust, steam or smoke, a dark-colored cloth, a mask; each dark gemstone (for example, jet or obsidian) counts as an ingredient.

Making and Breaking

Any sharp-edged tool, gold, diamond. For repair spells: lodestone, gum or sap, a needle, thread or ribbon, fat. For breaking-related spells: a hammer, a crowbar, vinegar, jade.

Meta-spells

Frankinsense, jasmine, mandrake, myrrh, ginger, saffron, quartz, diamond, meteoric iron, hematite, opal, a wand, a garment embroidered with mystical symbols.

Mind Control

Cinnamon, gold, mandrake, the heart of an intelligent creature, opal, bloodstone, a polished metal disk, a leather thong, a picture, doll, or other object which has been made to look like the subject (no artistic skill necessary; it's the attempt that matters). Anything once part of the subject's body, such as hair, blood, or sweat, counts as two ingredients.

Movement

A feather, ginger, hemlock, malachite, hematite, aquamarine, coral, a knife, a wooden wand.

Necromantic

Blood, dirt from a graveyard or tomb, jet, nightshade, an ebony wand or staff. Casting a spell in a tomb or graveyard counts as two ingredients. Bones of a sentient creature count as two ingredients.

Virgin's blood and incense may each be used as two ingredients in summoning and banishing spells.

Plant

A sickle, thistle, cardamom, fresh blood, fresh fruit, jade, agate, topaz, silver, bronze, a wooden wand or staff.

Protection and Warning

A bell, a polished stone object, an eye, pepper, a metal or metal-encased wand, sandalwood, any bronze object. Iron Arm may use a bronze gauntlet or bracelet as an ingredient.

Sound

Sapphire, turquoise, lapis lazuli, a horn, a bell, a hollow tube, an ear. Silencing spells, such as Hush and Mage-Stealth, may use raw silk fiber as an ingredient.

Spell Ingredients In Play

The ingredient lists should provide magicians with a range of possibilities for peculiar things to fill their pouches. Each college has more possible ingredients than the most complex spells require, and many materials can be used across colleges, so it doesn't take much to enable a magician to cast a large number of spells. The precise materials chosen and whether a spellcaster carries durable or expendable materials, therefore, are strategic choices. Expendable materials are generally much cheaper and more compact on a casting-by-casting basis, but they allow a limited number of castings, whereas durable materials weigh and cost more but last longer.

Likewise, versatile objects allow a magician to cast lots of spells without worrying about grabbing new materials out of a bag or pocket, but leave him vulnerable in case they should break. Many ingredients, being rare and valuable substances, may also be subject to theft. The prudent spellcaster will carry a range of materials, perhaps relying on multi-purpose durable ones but keeping at least a small supply of expendables and special-purpose ingredients on hand if the durables break.

The range of materials available to spellcasters ensures that they won't be crippled if the supply of any one ingredient dries up. However, limiting ingredients will still put pressure on powerful spellcasters. Most spells can be cast with the use of one or two common ingredients, so hedge-wizards and village wise women will generally be able to cast their spells without trouble. However, more complex spells require more ingredients, forcing casters to use more rare and expensive materials. A general decline in the supply of spices or precious stones will make those ingredients harder to get, which will complicate life considerably for more powerful magicians.

Those materials will also be considerably harder to replace for wizards far away from centers of trade and civilization. Burning out a diamond-set gold ring is one thing to a magician in his study a few streets away from a jeweler, but quite another if he is fighting off goblins in a rugged mountain range surrounded by miles of desert.

Spell Ingredients and Alchemy

These rules can be used not just to fill the pouches of magicians, but also the cabinets of alchemists. A third of the cost of raw materials for an elixir can be assumed to be generic alchemical materials: dried herbs toadstools, oil of vitriol, eye of newt, wing of bat, etc. Unlike most of the materials listed above, the generic materials should be relatively common in the alchemist's home region rather than imported from far away.

Detection and analysis (p. M88-89) and other alchemical tasks (p. M91) not directly related to producing elixirs use generic materials only. A third of the cost goes to materials from the meta-spells college. The final third goes to materials required for the specific type of elixir. Any material (say, jade or bronze) can be used as an alchemical ingredient, specifically shaped objects (wands, stone spheres) can't, limiting the number of range of materials available to the alchemist. The materials necessary for each type of elixir correspond to the raw materials necessary for a college

of spells as detailed here:

Type	College
Animal Control	Animal
Combat Abilities	Body Control
Hostile Elixirs	Mind Control
Magical Abilities	Meta-spells
Medical Elixirs	Healing
Mental Abilities	Mind Control
Mental Control	Mind Control
Skills and Physical Abilities	Body Control

So, then, an alchemist making an Achilles elixir (invulnerability, from Combat Abilities, materials cost \$1000) would need \$333 of generic alchemy supplies, \$333 of meta-magic ingredients (perhaps diamond dust, ginger powder, and myrrh), and \$333 of ingredients for body control spells (say, dried orchids, a handful of pepper, and powdered ivory). The GM may come up with exceptions to the chart. For example, Apollo (foreknowledge, from Mental Abilities) may require ingredients for Knowledge spells, while Agni (fire resistance, from Magical Abilities) may require ingredients for Fire spells. Because alchemists use ingredients in larger quantities than spell-casters, they will be especially hurt by materials shortages.

Appendix Z: Form Blazing Sword!

by Brian Rogers

There are some weapons in popular Fantasy, SF, and Anime that are pulled out only when everything else has failed: when the monster has shrugged off all other attacks, the heroes finally remember their one totally unstoppable weapon, and maybe it will solve the problem. While this does increase dramatic tension, Player Characters are seldom willing to accept the ritual butt-kicking before they can unlimber their big gun. Nope, they haul out the [Blazing Sword of Arus](#) at the first sign of trouble, adhering to the time-old "big stick" policy of diplomacy. So how do you get the fictionally popular Unstoppable Weapon of Last Resort (or UWLR) into an RPG? Here are some ideas, from the purely mechanical to entirely character based.

- **The Damage Dealt Limitation:** Most systems let you pump up the power of a weapon by putting limitations on it, giving you more damage for points spent. The UWLR has a special form of that: the heroes cannot use it until they have tried to deliver a set amount of damage by other means. For example, the UWLR does a whopping 150 points of damage per hit but the PC can't activate it until he has tried to do 100 points of damage from his other, weaker attacks. This mirrors the Voltron model, and should be a sizable handicap for heroes whose regular attacks have little chance of damaging serious opposition; the PC will be mostly ineffective for several rounds before becoming a major threat. Why the hero can't use the weapon before then is left as an exercise for the player. (Another option is forcing the PC to make X attacks before drawing the UWLR, but the effect is the same.)
- **The Charging Battery Problem:** The independent systems that power the UWLR take several combat rounds to charge up, and once charged need to be fired, or the system will short out. The PC will be unable to keep the weapon constantly "at hand" without firing it off every few minutes, which is harsh on the local property values. Since the UWLR systems are totally independent, there's no reason for the hero not to be involved in the ritual butt-kicking before his big gun comes on line. If PCs try and do things like charge up on the way to the fight or hide until the weapon is charged, you can expand the limitation to say that the charging process requires venting waste energy or risk an overload -- that waste energy is best spent on the character's other weapon systems. Like the Damage Dealt Limitation, this is a weakness taken to reduce the cost or increase the power of the UWLR, but with a stronger in-game rationale.
- **The Damage Absorption Option:** Perhaps the UWLR is powered by the ritual butt-kicking. The PC absorbs the effect of the damage taken in combat, using it to power the UWLR. This absorption should block a fraction of the incoming damage at best to keep the "hero in dire straits" flavor intact. As a limitation, the character has an absorption threshold, where he can't use the UWLR until he's been hit by X amount of damage, with the UWLR's power being offset by this weakness. If the damage absorption is an advantage, then it's a whole different ball game: the UWLR could be used at any time, but at a damage of "Base + Damage Absorbed Before Use." The hero now has to balance the damage he can take before collapsing against the amount of hurting he wants to deliver with the UWLR.
- **The "But What Cost" Question:** The UWLR really is a last resort due to the problems it causes when applied. The comic-book hero Nexus had access to vast power, but if he overtaxed it stars would start to go out. While such a consequence might not have much impact on power hungry players (knowing that the GM probably won't obliterate the Sun), smaller, more personal consequences might. What if every time the hero used the UWLR he lost a year off his life, or had a 10% chance of dropping dead at the end of the fight? What if every use cost the hero a point from his highest attribute? [Or someone close the PC died?](#) Or a hundred random civilians perished? If the weapon were powerful enough the PCs would be loathe to get rid of it -- if only to make sure it didn't fall into the wrong hands -- but it isn't likely they'd start and end every fight with it.
- **The Honor Clause:** The PC could use the UWLR at any time, but doesn't for reasons of personal honor. After all, if the UWLR is so powerful that an untutored eight year old could use it to defeat any foe, how could the character feel any sense of victory when it comes into play? Much like the "At What Cost" weapons, the hero will try any other means of ending the fight before resorting to this dishonorable conclusion. This could be pure roleplaying, or the GM could enforce a "No Experience Award" for fights ended with the UWLR. The GM should design such UWLRs so only the honorable hero can use it, otherwise his buddies will steal it from him to

end fights faster.

Armed with these options, GMs and players alike can find ways to include even the most ridiculously over-powered weapons without worrying about their overuse. Hopefully . . . PCs can get crafty when they don't want to lose a fight.

Pyramid Review

The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Adventure Game



Published by [Decipher, Inc.](#)

Written by **Kenneth Hite, Matt Colville, Christian Moore, Steve Long, & Owen Seyler**

Boxed set; \$29.95

For fans of all things fantasy, the last few weeks of 2001 gave us two films to savor and debate. One was *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, and if we are not to see an RPG based upon that intellectual property, we are at least to see one based upon the second film, *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*. Decipher, better known for their *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* collectible card games, dip their toe into the roleplaying market with another big license in the form of *The Lord of the Rings RPG*. It should be pointed out that while this new game is published by Decipher, it has been designed and written by the creative team behind the late and much lamented Last Unicorn Games. The same team will also be making their second stab at the *Star Trek RPG* license later this year.

Before the full *Lord of the Rings RPG* comes out, Decipher have released *The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Adventure Game*, a box set designed to introduce new gamers to the hobby and old gamers to the setting and the system. Of course, this is not the first RPG to be based upon the works of Tolkien, but more properly the third. The first was the complex *M.E.R.P.* (or *Middle Earth Role Playing*) published by ICE and set not during the time of the War of the Ring, but much earlier in the Second Age of Middle Earth. This was followed by a second game in 1991, using much simpler rules than *M.E.R.P.* -- themselves a simplified version of the ICE house mechanics seen in the *RoleMaster RPG* and its ilk. Coincidentally, not only was this second RPG designed with an introductory bent, it was also called *The Lord of the Rings Adventure Game*.

Decipher's version is specifically set during the time of the first part of the trilogy from Peter Jackson, as it takes the players on the exciting journey of the fellowship through the mines of Moria. It comes as a lightweight box set within which is found:

- Four six-sided dice
- A thirty-two page *Welcome to Middle Earth* book
- A thirty-two page *Through the Mines of Moria* book
- A four-page Fast Play Rules sheet
- A "What is roleplaying?" and "What's in this box?" double-sided sheet
- Two sheets of stand up counters
- Nine full color character sheets
- Two full color poster maps

This is the order in which the contents come, so I had to leaf through to find the "What is roleplaying?" and "What's in this box?" sheet. Since this is an introductory boxed set, this should have been packed at the top of the contents and been the first thing that the prospective gamer should have found upon opening the box. On going through the rest of the contents the impression you get is, apart from the two books, is one of flimsiness. The counters need to be cut out and folded in accordance with the instructions given in the *Through the Mines of Moria* book, but are unfortunately printed on rather thin card. Actual construction is hampered by the markings on the sheets for cutting and folding not matching with those given in the instructions. Likewise, the character sheets are thin and feel as if they will not stand up to much usage . . .

The first thing you encounter is Kenneth Hite's *Welcome to Middle Earth*. This is a guide to Middle Earth that expands upon the information you see in the film. For those who have read the books, played *M.E.R.P.*, or looked at any of the guides, there is nothing new here, but for those who have not, this is still useful background information.

The meat of the game is Matt Colville's *Through the Mines of Moria*, which can just about be played as you go. To be honest, I would recommend that the GM read through it instead, as despite it being an introductory game, there is still a fair bit for the new referee to take in. Old hands should be able to grasp and understand the contents with very little effort. Once they are through the opening sequence, "The Watcher In The Water," which finds the fellowship at Moria's West Gate, then the biggest learning hurdle is over for the GM. Once inside, the adventure follows the path seen in the film, as between them Gandalf, Aragorn, and Gimli guide the nine to the East Gate. At a number of points during the adventure, those playing these characters must take Lore Tests or become lost and waste time as they backtrack.

The second battle is that of "The Chamber of Mazarbul" in which the denizens of Moria, including Orcs, Moria Orcs, an Orc Captain, and the Cave Troll discover the presence of the fellowship in the mines. They are chased from the chamber and onto the final encounter at "The Bridge of Khazad-Dûm," before escaping down to the East Gate. The game ends when the fellowship leaves the mines. The battles increase in toughness as the fellowship proceeds through the mines, modeling how overwhelming odds force the heroes to both fight and flee! All three battles make use of the game's three battle maps, although the depiction of the Bridge at Khazad-Dûm is spoiled by a lack of detail, unlike the other two.

At each stage as necessary, the adventure suggests skills and special moves that are appropriate to the scene. Thus during the final battle at Khazad-Dûm, the rules are given for Gandalf facing off against the Balrog and sundering the bridge itself. Likewise in the Battle of the Mazarbul it tells you how Legolas can pull off trick shots with his bow.

The "What Is Roleplay?" sheet explains the question in clear detail. One way it does this is by making the comparison with childhood games of cops and robbers, but it also draws a comparison with computer games. This brings the explanation nicely up to date.

So what do the players play? Essentially they can choose any one of the nine members of the fellowship. Of course, it is not likely that you can get nine players together plus the referee, so most will have to double up. The first among these should be the relatively weak and similar trio of hobbits -- Pippin, Merry, and Sam. The other characters are equally tough in their way, so anyone with "I wanna play an elf" syndrome should not be disappointed.

Each character sheet is full color and double-sided. On the front is a picture of the character, their attributes, edges, skills, flaws, racial abilities, and equipment, plus a list of their combat actions. On the reverse is an explanation of those combat options, plus each character's background and suggested quotes for use during the game. The Fast Play Rules explain everything on the sheets; although the only discrepancy is that the nimbleness attribute is renamed quickness in a couple of instances.

Characters have six attributes -- Strength, Vitality, Nimbleness, Wits, Bearing, and Perception; and four reactions that give a character situational modifiers -- Fortitude, Swiftiness, Willpower, and Wisdom. The game engine is simple: Roll 2d6, add any skills or modifiers, and achieve a target number or greater. Roll double six and you keep rolling an extra die and adding as long as you roll more sixes. Combat is rolled in the same fashion, but each character has a Defense value that is the target number an opponent needs to roll against. Should they hit, damage is rolled in multiples of the six-sided dice, so an arrow or dagger might do 1d6 worth of damage, but Aragon's sword Andúril will do 3d6. Any damage inflicted is deducted from a character's Wounds score -- the Hobbits have just forty, while most characters average some seventy points.

These are just the simplified version of the rules in the full *Lord of the Rings RPG*, but as presented in the "Through the Mines of Moria" book, and more easily summarized in the Fast Play Rules sheet, they cover just about most eventualities that might occur in the three battles and the interludes between.

Beyond a minor random element in the adventure game, there is not a great deal of longevity in this product. This is understandable as it is intended to just introduce *The Lord of the Rings RPG*. Completing the full journey through

Moria with everyone intact (or at least with just the death of Gandalf) may take a few attempts, but beyond this ***The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Adventure Game*** has little shelf life. So the fundamental question remains: How does this game work as an introduction to roleplaying? Actually, rather well. The rules are simple and both characters and situation should be familiar to the target audience. Further the game is fast-paced, especially during the three battles, but still leaving room for the down time in between in the interludes.

Yet you really come down to one overall factor with this product, and that is the price. Almost thirty dollars is a lot to pay for something that will not stand up to a lot of handling nor offer much in the way of replay value. For experienced gamers there is little here on offer; they should definitely wait for the full RPG to be released. That said, new players should get a kick out of ***The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Adventure Game*** if they are prepared to pay the price.

--*Matthew Pook*

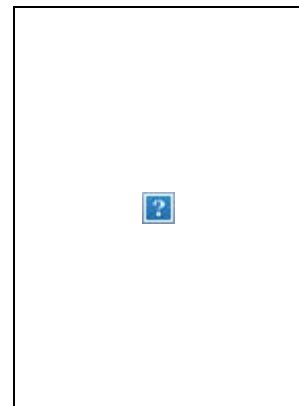
Pyramid Review

Arcana: Societies of Magic (for d20)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by **Kevin Brennan and James Maliszewski**

64 b&w pages; \$14.95



Green Ronin publishing continues to hit the high ranks of quality with their latest release. A 64-page perfect bound book, *Societies of Magic* introduces six organizations to any campaign. These organizations aren't tied to any particular land, god, or previous work and can be transplanted just about anywhere.

Each organization is given history, under "Inside the . . ." section, a listing of personalities, important maps, and campaign ideas. To make each organization unique, there are new feats, spells, races, and prestige classes.

The organizations are the Abbey of Green Steel. Here, the monks seek to become like outsiders in terms of raw power, even as they trap evil creatures into magic items to funnel new funds into their coffers. This chapter introduces the Green Steel Monk prestige class, as well as the feat, Unarmed Sunder. The first abbey, the Motherhouse, is fully mapped out.

The Dragon Gang is a collection of criminals who all boast some dragonic blood. The neat feat -- Draconic Bloodline -- allows players to have some dragonblood without being a new race, while those more interested in being somewhat inhuman can be drakelings, a new race where the creature has some dragon in her recent history. (Those seeking still more options should consult [Beyond the Veil](#) for information on dragon bloodspawns, quarter dragons.)

The Servants of Decay are a strange lot. These individuals serve an ancient an alien preternatural force that seeks to overcome all civilization and return the world to the time before the gods molded it into its current state. To insure that they have the power to do so, the Servant of Decay prestige class can utilize many abilities related to the preternatural plane, a place like the ethereal plane that borders the prime but is hard to access.

The Temple of the Living God is a bit different than most standard "Living Gods" in that the god Viraxis, a god associated with secrets, lost numerous worshippers; his faith and power were minimal and to assure himself of life, this god has merged with his head priest, the old man Matras. The Divine Avatar Template allows GMs to augment a god's champions with vast powers.

The Tribunal of Arcane Law is something that'll fit in high magic campaign worlds without a hitch. It's a collection of mages who work against those who would damage magic, or change the world's perception of mages. They're not really worried about evil mages, but they are worried about evil mages who try to destroy whole cities with a single spell. Interestingly enough, the Tribunal employs fighters and rogues to handle most of the relics and items they retrieve, as the temptation to use these items often proves too great for mages. In addition, the new prestige class, Wizard Slayer, insures that no matter how powerful the mage, the Tribunal will still be a force to be feared.

The School Beyond the Veil is another interesting twist. Here, an undead creature has resurrected an ancient fighting school and style to gather a body of followers to him. The inner cult seeks knowledge of utilizing undeath to gather strength, similar to the way the Green Monks use outsider energy. Several new combat feats, moon wraith undead template, and the moon wraith adept prestige class go a long way in making these warriors very specialized in their art.

In addition to specific information for each perspective society, there are generic rules for things like drugs and addition, along with magic and the law, found under the mob like Dragon gang, and a new domain, that of Secrets,

under The Temple of the Living God. All this goes a long way in providing the GM and his players use out of this book even if he doesn't use a single society.

There are a few things I don't like about the book. The first is that it's too small. There aren't enough crunchy bits in terms of spells. I expect a series titled "Arcana" to have at least one new spell per spell level. While each society has two NPCs associated with it, there are often several important figures left statless. Take the Colossus, a construction mentioned but not detailed. Another weakness is that there are not enough options on using the societies in anything other than a standard *d20* fantasy game. Run a campaign using *Oriental Adventures*, the planes, or historical? No help here. In addition, interior covers aren't used. If they were, the OGL and the ad could have went there rather than into the book itself. In addition, unlike Atlas, there is no index. This would have been nice to get a master listing of NPCs, feats, prestige classes, and other crunchy bits without having to flip through the book. Still, these are mostly minor complaints. If the book detailed out more npcs and spells, the page and price could would have to jump up.

One of the strengths of Green Ronin is their willingness to published all of their written material as Open Gaming Content. No stat blocks without names, no PI on every other word, no funky different colored boxes to show what is and isn't OGC. Fortunately, they continue this great tradition with this book so the entire book, outside of art, is OGC.

Although players will get some use out of it, *Arcana: Societies of Magic* is most definitely a GM tool, providing ideas for dozens of adventurers.

(A four-page preview of the goods inside Arcana is available online at http://www.greenronin.com/files/arcana_pre.pdf)

--Joe G. Kushner

Dork Tower!



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Games Without Frontiers, War Without Tears

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(This is, in itself, an odd thing for me to really think about; really, I'm guessing that I'm part of the last batch of folks who would have been most likely introduced into gaming through wargames . . . at least, the "cardboard counter on a giant hex map board" type of wargame. I'll be curious to see, in another generation, how many gamers are brought over by the miniatures wargaming hobby.)

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To be sure, the absolute *best* wargames were (at least to my mind) Milton Bradley's Gamemaster series, which I believe started around 1983 or 1984; the rules were pretty simple, but the strategies were generally pretty complex and allowed for varied gameplay. (For some reason I had a fascination with building up Russia's submarine fleet to monstrous levels. Because, really, when you think of the Soviet Union, you think of unparalleled naval might.) And, of course, they had those neat plastic pieces instead of the boring cardboard chits.

Anyway, we spent many an enjoyable evening determining the fate of the world, whether it fell to the decisiveness of ninjas, Nazis, pirates, or orbital lasers. Some games I lost; others I won. Regardless, I learned a lot about strategy, assimilating rules, and good gaming conduct. And we both always seemed to have a good time; we'd talk about exciting games, variant strategies either side could have taken, and so on. (I wasn't particularly interested in sports, so this was the means we used to communicate, being men and unable to speak directly to each other.)

In hindsight, I viewed those experiences as Simulationist. Take a game like *Broadsides and Boarding Parties*, the Gamemaster series pirate game where two ships fight each other, with both cannons and . . . um . . . boarding parties. In my mind, there isn't a big difference between playing a wargame between two ships, and playing a Simulationist RPG game pitting your ship against the GM's forces. In each the outcome is the result of the actions of both sides, and luck. Regardless, if anything particularly interesting or exciting happens, it's not because it's scripted to happen, or because it's dramatically appropriate. In one game I vividly remembered for years, I was able to maneuver my crippled ship into a perfect broadside attack, drastically evening the odds between the two vessels.

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Anyway, one time towards the end of our gaming era I asked, almost off-hand, "Y'know, given how many years you've studied military history, strategy gaming, and other World War II stuff, I'm surprised I was able to win as often as I did at *Axis & Allies* . . . especially since I was 10 when we started. I'm curious; did you ever let me win?"

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In some ways I'm mildly upset contemplating the notion of Jim throwing games in my favor; doesn't that cheapen every game I may have won legitimately (even if I could have known which games those were)? This is the crux of the Simulationist view, as I see it; what's the point of playing a game, of simulating reality, if some unseen Hand of Fate is going to intervene to push the participants towards a preordained outcome? Why not sit at home and wait for the Hand to fax you the results?

But, with the eyes of a legally defined "adult" I can understand Jim's view perfectly; really, it's not that much fun to continuously annihilate a 10-year-old . . . especially the same stepson you're trying to establish some kind of meaningful bond with. And if you can enhance the experience for everyone by fudging rules, rolls, and decisions, where is the harm? If the point of a game is ultimately to have fun, and we did, what's wrong with using any means necessary? This is the crux of the Romantic view, in my mind. Yes, there are rules and a structure, but that's an artifice to help build fun, not the be-all and end-all. In the same way the point of a drinking game is not to win but to drink, so too is the purpose of a Romantic game is not to follow rules, but to create compelling stories (and, ultimately, memories).

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Speaking of Other Plans, I'm outta here for a week. Yes, my annual February Christmas vacation is here, and I'll be gone from the 15th through the 24th. Email, if I have access at all, is likely to be spotty and unreliable.

So, please . . . I beg you to forestall any emergencies and disasters for at least the next nine days.

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After that, I'll be having not one, but two (count 'em, *two*) chats on Tuesday, February 26th. The first will be at 7 PM CST and will be an informal "How'm I doin'?" kind of affair to celebrate the beginning of my third year as editor. Ask questions, make comments, fling fruit . . . it's all good.

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(Can you tell I'm a bit loopy from both sleep deprivation and excitement over getting a week off?)

--Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Kithbook: Redcaps**, p. 25*

(Two stars) "Decide who will be the first storyteller. This could be the oldest player, the youngest player, or (as is traditional -- at least among bearded game designers) the player with the longest beard."

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Hyperworld vs. the Invadroids

by Chad Underkoffler

Genre: Supers with Alien Invasion Robots/Monsters and Mecha

Style: Four-Color Action and (somewhat) Realistic Psychology

Themes: Man vs. Superman, (Super)Man vs. the Unknown

Campaign Setting and Background Information

Our Earth, 6 months into the future.

What Everybody Knows

Timeline

February: It all started with an unexpected meteor shower on February 2nd. But those pretty streaks in the sky weren't space rocks; they were Class Zero Invadroids -- cantaloupe-sized metal balls full of alien nanotechnology.

Class Zero Invadroid



- *March:* Increased incidences of missing persons, abandoned farmhouses, cattle mutilations, and Bigfoot sightings, as the Class Zeroes transformed plants, animals, and people into weapons.
- *April:* There were no survivors from the explosion that took out an Agribiz farm in Oklahoma (April 7th), and

the security camera film from Drexlabs in Colorado was destroyed (April 15th). In the wake of 9-11 and the anthrax scare, the media labeled these first attacks as terrorist activity. The Office of Homeland Security scrambled to investigate the incidents with the FBI. It wasn't until the attack on Abilene, KS, on April 26th, that the enemy was seen. Local media affiliates carried the weird, blobby images of thirty fearsome alien fighting machines -- Class 1 Invadroids -- across the globe.

- Military forces arrived within the hour, but suffered heavy losses against the Invadroids. Standard weapons didn't even slow them down. The entire city would have been destroyed and its inhabitants used as "spare parts" if not for the actions of the first known hyperhumans: Stormfront.
- Ragamuffin, Robotica, Sekhmet, and Professor Theodore Storm almost single-handedly turned back the Invadroid assault. Their first CNN interview, amidst the still smoking debris, gave the nation -- and the world -- hope for survival (and made them media darlings). Yet their appearance raised more questions than it answered. Where did these Invadroids come from? Why are they here? Why are they targeting the USA? What do they want? Why did Stormfront get super-powers instead of being converted into Class 1s? What is the government going to do about all of this?
- *May*: On May 1st, the President signed an Executive Order forming GHOTI, the Global Headquarters for Opposing Terrestrial Invasion. GHOTI's mission was (initially) to act as a coordination center for defense, research, and rescue efforts between various US entities like the DoD, FEMA, OHS, FBI, NSA, CDC, etc. Under the command of Captain Arthur Porter (US Navy, ret.), GHOTI quickly synchronized recovery missions with the CDC quarantine the Abilene battle zone -- too quickly, many cynics whisper, as if this organization had been waiting in the wings . . .

The President publicly asked the members of Stormfront to join GHOTI to aid in defense, relief, and research efforts. Stormfront agreed -- but not without strong media statements about maintaining their autonomy. GHOTI assents to their terms. Study of their hyperhuman abilities alone granted invaluable information, and their continuing work in battle and in the public eye reassures the populace.

Following the Invadroid incursions into Mexico (May 11th) and Canada (May 27th), those nations pledged resources to GHOTI, making it an organization with international scope. In the last week of April, Invadroid attacks involving 3 to 5 Class 1s begin, with an average of one every three weeks.

- *June*: Pittsburgh suffers the attack of the first known Class 2 Invadroid (dubbed "Magarac" by the media) on June 8th; again, disaster is averted by the timely arrival of hyperhumans -- this time, the Mythmen: Dragon, Griffin, Manticore, and Unicorn. Using their hyperpowers in concert, they destroy Magarac after a battle leaving the Golden Triangle in ruins. Unlike Stormfront, they refuse to disclose their true identities to the world.
- *July*: On July 13th, Dr. Stephanie Drexel, founder of Drexlabs, completes an amazing feat of engineering by creating a functional battlesuit, hybridized from ongoing DARPA EHPA (Exoskeletons for Human Performance Augmentation) projects and back-engineered Invadroid technology. After a daring test pitting the DL-X against Class 1s in Arizona, she offered the technology to GHOTI. Captain Porter responded by placing her in charge of the GHOTI Research Division. Worldwide communications failures occur on July 24th, service is quickly restored within 12 hours.
- *August*: On August 5th, Dr. Drexel and Captain Porter unveil the Geo-Knights, a small volunteer force of soldiers, rescue workers, and scientists, wearing production models of the DL-X. A half-dozen Geo-Knights or a single hyperhuman can handle a handful of Class 1s, while Class 2s require a team of hyperhumans or a single hyperhuman backed by a squad of Geo-Knights to put down. Things were looking up; though under assault, the Earth had risen to the challenge. Then, on the 19th, the first (and thus far, only) Class 3 Invadroid -- King Zilla -- attacked San Francisco.

It took the combined might of Stormfront, the Mythmen, and two platoons of Geo-Knights to simply drive off the gigantic beast. Casualties were heavy -- in the Battle at Golden Gate, fifteen Geo-Knights died, Griffon suffered tremendous burn damage, and Robotica went into a three-week coma. Before a nuclear strike could be targeted, the creature escaped out to sea.

- *September*: Today. Life goes on with a surprising normality in the wake of catastrophic events. While the US has not declared martial law, the authorities are exceedingly security-conscious -- not only worried about

Invadroid attacks, but anti-American opportunists taking advantage of the sporadic chaos. A few metropolitan areas have a GHOTI field office, and there is a national 1-800 number and website for reporting alien attacks. The UN and the USA debate whether or not to bring GHOTI under the UN aegis, while countries all over the world chokingly beg for assistance against the Invadroids -- who no longer focus solely on North America.

King Zilla lurks out in the wide blue Pacific, with sightings in Alaska (on the 12th) and New Zealand (on the 21st). Stormfront heads the bill of a fundraiser that packs Giants Stadium on September 25th.

Then, on September 28th, another brightly colored starfall darkens the night skies of Earth. . .

Zeitgeist

While the public has, in general, become a bit more paranoid and jumpy due to the existence of the Invadroids, they have also allowed themselves to accept the hope offered by Stormfront, the Mythmen, and the Geo-Knights. This flux of emotion leads to short tempers and strained relationships. Messianic and apocalyptic cults are on the rise, preaching various contradictory testaments about the aliens and the hyperhumans. The media backpedals daily upon whether to treat the hyperhumans as savior-celebrities or dangerous monster-freaks. Interest in the space program has received a shot in the arm, now that we know for sure that life (or something much like it) exists out among the stars. Optimism burns brightly: the knowledge that a common enemy exists has increased the volume of dialogue on peace and alliance between nations, but the world has not become a bastion of human solidarity overnight.

Invadroid Facts

From the GHOTI FAQ at <http://www.ghoti.gov/faq/>

Q5: Where do the Invadroids come from?

A5: Unknown at this time, but analysis of isotopes of the aliens point to an extraterrestrial origin.

Q6: What are the differences between the classes of Invadroids?

A6: We currently divide Invadroids into 4 classes as follows:

A6.1: Class Zero -- Metallic irregular sphere about 6" in diameter, filled with alien nanomachines. They disassemble and reassemble organic material into Class 1 Invadroids; a single Class Zero can generate up to 5 Class 1s (the process usually -- but not always -- takes 2 days per Invadroid, given suitable organic matter).

A6.2: Class 1 -- Composed of modified organic material, typical Class 1 Invadroids are man-sized or slightly larger (4' to 12') blobby, bluish humanoids. They are strong, fast, and cunning, but we do not believe that they are intelligent (though evidence indicates that the more intelligent the source organism is, the more intelligent the Invadroid). Equipped with various weapons [Note 1] and armor [Note 2].

Given a place of safety and a supply of water, metal, and organic material, their armor thickens and they shift to a sedentary "Builder" mode. Class 1 Builder Invadroids act as gathering points for typical Class 1s, who help "feed" and protect it. In return, a Class 1 Builder can repair other Class 1s, and modify them into Class 2s.

[Note 1] Soldier Invadroid weapons vary, based on the organic material(s) used in their construction. No Class 1 Invadroid has yet been seen to mount both Types A and B; all possess Type C. Observed weapon Types include:

A. Knobby extrusions that fire organic pellets, comparable to a .50 caliber bullet, with

a "magazine" of 100 rounds. Given a short refractory period (15 minutes) and twenty pounds of organic matter, a Class 1 can "reload" fully.

- B. Vane-like extrusions that fire particle beams, comparable in power to a bazooka shell, with a "battery" of 20 shots. Given high-UV light, a long refractory period (1 hour), and twenty pounds of organic material, a Soldier can "recharge" fully.
- C. Claws, able to cut through 1/2" of steel or 3" of solid wood easily.

[Note 2] Invadroid armor is a thick organic polymer, rubbery to the touch and quite resilient -- a Class 1 ignores small-arms fire. However, Invadroid weapon Types -- as well as hyperpowers (see Q8, below) -- are dramatically more effective against it.

A6.3: Class 2 -- A fusion of modified organic material and metallic elements, Class 2s can stand as tall as a small building (30' to 60'). They can be any color, though their organic elements retain a bluish tint. Class 2s are immensely strong and heavily armored -- even mortar fire has little effect. They mount all three weapon Types of the Class 1s, and additionally have a unique ability, classified as Type D functions. Examples of Type D functions include Magarac's metal-liquefying ray, Punx-Z 's high-speed tunneling capability, and Detroit Dan's facility at separating and rejoining its component vehicles.

A6.4: Class 3 -- The single Class 3 detected so far (King Zilla, see Q.10) contains an abundance of silicates in its makeup material, in addition to organic and metallic materials. While loath to draw generalities from a specific case, we believe that other Class 3s will be very large (100' to 300'), immensely strong, and gifted with nearly impenetrable armoring. It's probable that they will have at least one, if not more, Type D abilities.

There must be a hidden "Class 2 Builder" that constructed King Zilla. GHOTI is pursuing all leads in this regard, and will update the answer to this question when more is known. If you have any information that you believe can help, call 1-800-GO-GHOTI.

Hyperhuman Facts

From "Ask Ragamuffin!" at <http://www.stormfront.com/ragamuffin/>

Bubbles12@aol.com asks, "Ragamuffin, how did you get your hyperpowers, and why are they different than Sekhmet's or Robotica's? Why doesn't Professor Storm have any?"

Well, Bubbles12, here's the Cliff Notes version: Keisha and I worked at a coffee shop in Abilene called Caffienation Station. There were two customers that morning -- Nicole and "Professor" Theodore Storm. We knew one another from Abilene Community College. Prof had found a Class Zero Invadroid in the back yard of his house and was taking it to a friend in the Science Department for study, when he stopped on the way for his usual latte.

When the first wave of Invadroids attacked at 10 am, the Class Zero in Prof's shoulder bag exploded, coating the four of us with greenish dust. We know now that this dust was really a bunch of tiny robots called *nanomachines* that were trying to turn us into Class 1s. Something went wrong, and all of a sudden boom! -- I'm punked out, Keisha's furry, and Nicole's shiny. All four of us felt an overpowering urge to go and kick Invadroid butt, and the rest is history.

Our "primary bodies" (that's the bodies we were born with) gained some benefits. We are stronger and tougher than we used to be (I know I can lift a lot more now!), we all heal quickly -- Sekhmet broke her arm after the Battle of Abilene, and it healed completely in two weeks; and we can detect the presence of Invadroids within a mile. The big downside is that we're driven to join battle with them, no matter what we're doing at the time.

Most hyperhumans have a "secondary body" that they can switch to -- like Robotica's metallic sheath, Sekhmet's

leonine form, or Unicorn's horse-like appearance. It grants additional hyperpowers, like my kinetic invulnerability, Griffon's flight ability, or Dragon's Flaming Breath. Prof has all the primary benefits that we have, but for some reason lacks a secondary body and associated hyperpowers gained from having one.

I hope that's answered your question, Bubbles12! Thanks for writing!

(Readers who'd like more detail on the Abilene Event should look for Vic Lane's article in the May 13, 2002 issue of *Time Magazine*; ongoing discussion of hyperpowers is happening in a multitude of peer-reviewed scientific journals, as well as the Hyperpowers Discussion Board at <http://www.ghoti.gov>.)

BLyman@hotmail.com asks, "Ragamuffin, where does all the money from the Stormfront products -- the toys, the comics books, the TV shows, the CDs -- go? Are you getting rich off of this?"

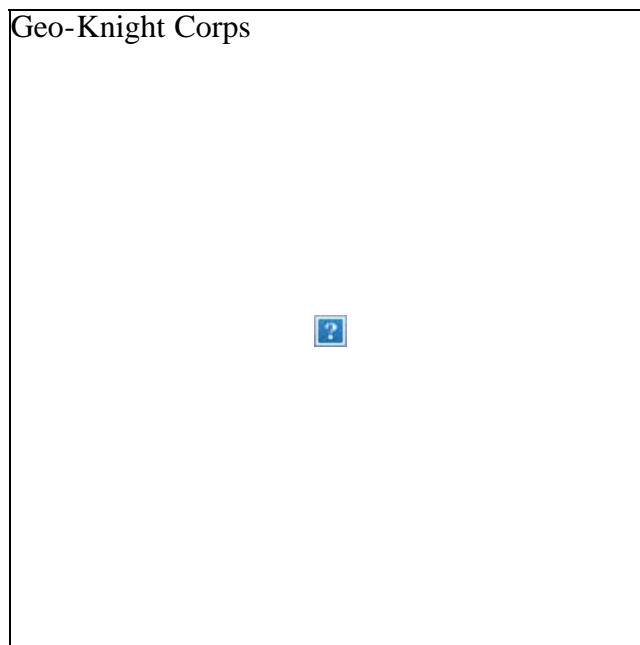
BLyman, the net profits of all Stormfront licensed products, media work, and so forth -- after paying our costs -- break down this way: 90% goes to the Abilene Fund (for relief to victims of Invadroid attacks), 8% goes to into GHOTI's research division budget (see the GHOTI FAQ for more information on that <http://www.ghoti.gov/faq/>), and 2% is divided amongst the members of Stormfront, in lieu of salaries or other compensation. It's significantly more than I was making at Caffeination Station, but less than many pro athletes or middle management of Fortune 500 companies. After all, it's our images being used, we should get something.

On that note, I'd like to add my voice to the public outcry against those people profiting off of pirating the images of the Mythmen. People shouldn't create products based around the Mythmens' likenesses without their permission, thinking they'll be able to avoid lawsuits because the Mythmen haven't announced their identities like Keisha, Nicole, and I did. I'm glad to hear that Backdoor Pictures has stopped work on the Mythmen movie they had in development pending some sort of agreement. Kudos!

Drexlabs DL-1 Geo-Knight Battlesuit Capabilities

From the DL-1 Information Page at <http://www.drexlabscorp.com/dl-1/info.html>

Vanguard engineering and breakthroughs in materials technology by Drexlabs has led to the DL-1 exoskeleton. The DL-1 provides increased speed, strength, endurance, and protection in the field, not just for soldiers, but for rescue workers as well.



The DL-1 triples the lifting power and carrying capacity of the pilot. Specialized pseudo-musculature further enhances

their leg muscles, allowing running speeds of 60 mph and vertical jumps of 40 feet or more. Combined with advanced fly-by-wire Paraglider Packs, a DL-1 can run, leap, spread their wings, and glide airborne over rough or broken terrain. In addition, the flexible armoring of the DL-1 is impervious to small-arms fire or shrapnel, and is an NBC rated environment suit. Its neutral gray surface can be painted with a variety of camouflage patterns. The DL-1 currently has a mission endurance of twelve hours, and is easily recharged in the field with proper equipment.

The DL-1 is seeing service currently in the GK Corps of GHOTI. Three new prototypes are on the boards, incorporating specialized capability support modules (biomedical, search-and-rescue, combat), integral armament based on Invadroid Type B weaponry, and improvements suggested by current DL-1 pilots.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

Why Earth?

Why have the Invadroids targeted Earth? Because something they were chasing came here.

In AD 1221, an alien saucer crashed in the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest. In 1938, an archeological team looking for Native American artifacts stumbled across the saucer. They quietly notified the government; the President initiated Project Teacup, which drew a veil of secrecy over the entire affair.

Despite the Project's efforts, the saucer remains an enigma (see below, **Items & Locations**, for more information). The aliens were dubbed the "Frith" because a series of pictograms in the "cockpit" -- one of the few examples of writing inside the saucer -- resembles those Roman letters.

The four corpses of the Frith crew gave up some of their secrets. Ongoing analysis has been both illuminating and frustrating for researchers, but has indirectly led to a handful of Earth biotech breakthroughs: new anti-coagulants, new analgesics, increased understanding of the rod and cone structures of human retina, etc. These spin-offs came from Project Teacup's attempts "to build the tools to build the tools" suitable to analyze the aliens.

GHOTI, inheritor of Project Teacup, theorizes that the Invadroids targeted North America for their first assault due to the presence of the Frith Saucer.

Invadroid Secrets

The Invadroids have annihilated the race humans call the Frith, and are hunting down all stragglers to incorporate into their bio-banks. They followed the last Frith saucer to Earth, but at sublight speeds.

Invadroid Prime (in essence, a Class 5 Invadroid) remains in Earth orbit, cloaked from human detection. In the eight months since launching its complement of 144 Class Zeroes, it has quietly been collecting inactive satellites and space junk to combine with internal resources and generate more Class Zeroes.

Of the 144 launched:

- 23 burned up on reentry due to design flaws.
- 25 crashed due to misfires of their landing balloons.
- 28 did not activate, and may still lay inert, waiting for stimuli.
- 68 activated successfully, yielding approximately 270 Class 1s on Earth, many of which have been destroyed, and some that converted into Class 1 Builders.

Normally, an orbiting Prime would coordinate Invadroids through communications channels; fortunately for humanity, the Earth is electro-magnetically noisy. Control has been erratic and error-prone. Prime plans to launch a second wave of Class Zeroes, and then a third, which it will drop after destroying all orbiting communications satellites. This will assure victory and provide a planet rich with organic materials for exploitation.

Unfortunately, Prime doesn't know he's sick -- infected with the Frith psi-nanovirus. The crew of the last Frith saucer he consumed centuries ago inoculated themselves, in an attempt to taint the Invadroid's nanomachine banks. They succeeded: 30% of all Class Zeroes Invadroid Prime creates carry the virus. Infected Class Zeroes create hyperhumans instead of Class 1s. The varied forms and abilities of hyperhumans is due to the lack of Invadroid programming of the nanomachines (erased by the virus), combined with the psychic sensitivity of the virus: instead of reshaping flesh to Class 1 templates, the victims' minds provide templates (see below for more information).

Hyperhuman Secrets

Hyperpowers are not merely granted by alien disassembler/reassembler nanomachines tainted with a psi-virus. The nature of human psychology -- and psychic ability -- plays a part.

Humans, like most primates, are social beings. Untold millennia of jockeying for position in the pack have led to specialized adaptations in psychology and physiology, allowing observations that consciously and rationally may no longer be obvious, yet nonetheless exist. This dynamic interplay of factors, decoded by the "sensitive" or "psychic," can lead to insights and intuitions often considered supernatural. Unknowingly, humans are always using them.

Yet take the sensitive out of a social milieu, and those adaptations are useless. Isolate the sensitive (say, in a scientific double-blind research study) and their abilities vanish. In short, all humans have "psychic powers" (to a greater or lesser extent), but *only* around other people.

This social requirement of parapsychology explains a nagging issue of hyperhumans: they never appear singly, only in groups. Only humans in a high state of social exchange can properly take advantage of the virus-tainted Class Zero nanomachines. The social dynamics of the four people who became Stormfront -- typical collegiate romantic and personal rivalries, in an atmosphere of late adolescents and young adults (interestingly, "Professor" Theodore Storm is the oldest known hyperhuman at 25) -- allowed them to survive the Class Zero's nanomachines and gain hyperpowers. If, say, Nicole Woodman had been the only person in the shop when the Class Zero activated, it's probable that she would have simply become a Class 1. (It is unknown at this time what effect further exposure to the nanomachines would have on a hyperhuman; speculation ranges from developing additional powers to transforming into a *hyperpowered* Class 1.)

Another fascinating topic is the secondary body of a hyperhuman. The physics behind the switching process between primary and secondary bodies is still a mystery, but the two leading theories are:

1. *Hyperspace Displacement*: One body is in the real world, while the other waits in another dimension. The hyperhuman mind triggers a swap between forms, much as a person would change clothes.
2. *Neutrino Energy to Matter Condensation*: Neutrinos sleeting through the Earth are somehow captured, collected, and forced to condense into the matter of the secondary body around the primary body.

Research continues on both theories.

The nature of the secondary body seems to address the doubts, fears, dreams, and desires of the target. The cases of Nicole "Robotica" Woodman and Morgana "Ragamuffin" Raven display this. Woodman worried to an almost pathological extent about her appearance, despite being an attractive teen, and suffered a lack of self-confidence due to a propensity towards unrequited crushes. As Robotica, she is a steel goddess -- brash, bold, beautiful, the cynosure of all eyes. Raven, on the other hand, grew up beautiful and knowing it, a cheerleader, a solid-C student (despite her great efforts to achieve more), and found herself the target of discrimination based solely on her appearance. As Ragamuffin, she is an intellectual genius and has total photographic recall, while her normal appearance is effaced strongly by the Goth/punk body modifications and accessories of her secondary body.

Theodore Storm's lack of a secondary body is a mystery whose answer can have compelling effects on this campaign, by defining the cause of hyperpower development and suggesting interesting stories, characters, or adventures. Is Storm's lack of a secondary body due to:

- A. His "advanced" age?
- B. His self-assurance and well-adjusted nature?
- C. His role in the social dynamic of the three women (essentially, as an object of desire)?
- D. The expectations of other people in the process (i.e., what the three women wanted him to be)?
- E. Robotica received half of the "dose" intended for him (see **NPC Backgrounds: Robotica** below)?
- F. A combination of all of these, or an unknown factor?

If any of these are reasons, it will change a character's hyperpowers, subtly or significantly. For example, if Bob is playing in a campaign where C and D are the main factors in determining hyperpowers, perhaps the *other players* select hyperpowers for Bob's PC.

GHOTI Secrets

GHOTI researchers have isolated a common element from samples taken from the tainted Class Zero that gave Stormfront hyperpowers and samples taken secretly from the members of Stormfront and the Mythmen -- the Frith virus. However, Earth science is not adequately advanced to analyze it, much less duplicate it. Researchers have introduced the virus into captured Class Zeroes -- a single run of experiments (Codename: Koi) in an attempt to replicate hyperpowers using lab animals failed disastrously. Without the socio-psionic interplay of humanity to trigger the virus, what resulted were small Class 1s. Also, despite stringent clean room procedures, GHOTI researchers have an unlucky tendency to be warped into Invadroids. This happens because other members of these research teams are too far away, sealed in their own environment suits, or trying to escape from the contagion zone for the social dynamic of human groups to activate the virus. (But one day, it may happen . . .)

Covertly, GHOTI is investigating the secret identities of the Mythmen -- purely in the interests of Earth, of course. Unfortunately, the secondary bodies of the Mythmen are so monstrous as to obscure clues to their primary bodies. Agents are focusing on the Pittsburgh region, and are specifically looking for "weird stuff" and individuals who suddenly show the improved physical abilities of a hyperhuman primary body -- sudden physical aptitude, rapid healing, and attraction to Invadroid attack sites.

Drexlabs Secrets

Dr. Drexel's big secrets are:

- A. She keeps her prototype DL-X battlesuit with her at all times, because of her fear of Invadroids (though she hasn't worn it since her test in Arizona).
- B. She's been holding back small amounts of funds and materiel, enough to equip a small squad of "Black Knights" loyal to her, not GHOTI.
- C. Geo-Knight armor isn't constructed from materials "back-engineered" from Invadroid tech so much as it's molded out of "melted down and reprocessed" Class 1 organic material. This has two unknown drawbacks:
 1. Prolonged wearing of a battlesuit will psychically take its toll on the pilot; Geo-Knights without sufficient R&R show increased incidences of nightmares, strange urges, disembodied voices, and hallucinations.
 2. If Invadroid Prime succeeds in destroying enough of Earth's communications satellites to eliminate the jamming of its control channels, most Geo-Knights will come under Prime's control.

NPC Backgrounds

GHOTI

GHOTI



The word "ghoti" is -- as popularly attributed to [George Bernard Shaw](#) properly pronounced as "fish." However, the US media has pronounced it as "go-tee" or "goatee" since the Executive Order forming the organization. GHOTI agents use the "fish" pronunciation amongst themselves; additionally, call signs, project identifiers, and code phrases often have an aquatic quality -- for example, the GHOTI Command and Control Center is called "the Fishbowl" among agents.

GHOTI actively recruits from former military personnel and the fields of law enforcement and rescue/crisis workers. A smaller number come from research labs and universities. The majority of their time is spent investigating and recovering from Invadroid activity; scientific specialists spend their time researching Invadroid and hyperhuman capabilities and origins (and only those with the highest clearance know of the Frith).

Any agent can apply for the eight-week Geo-Knight basic training: only the best 10% of any graduating class are assigned to the GK Corps. If not selected, agents must wait six months before applying for the accelerated four-week reattempt course.

Captain Arthur Porter, US Navy (ret.): A decorated Navy pilot, Porter entered the ranks of Project Teacup in 1988 after his F-14 collided with a glowing UFO that appeared out of nowhere (believed to be a psychic projection caused by a remote viewer entering the Frith saucer, see **Items & Locations** below). The Project agent who analyzed Porter's debriefing recognized a man who could go far, and recommended the pilot for recruitment. When the Project became GHOTI, Porter had the seniority, skills, and history necessary to head the new organization. Blessed with a ready wit, Porter administers GHOTI with a rough paternal aplomb. He retains his expert piloting skills, has good understanding of the science (or lack thereof) behind the Invadroids and hyperhumanity, and is commander-in-chief of the GK Corps. While dedicated to preserving Earth at all costs, he has a strong bias in favor of America, which gets him into trouble with the international public.

Doctor Stephanie Drexel: Drexel is a polymath, with genius-level intellect in several fields including chemistry, materials engineering, and economics. She's an accomplished poet, but a terrible public speaker. A handsome woman, she bears a striking resemblance to the Thirties actress Margaret Dumont. She founded Drexlabs in 1994, and under her direction it rose quickly to be a well-regarded defense contractor. Slightly paranoid, she has absolute confidence in herself, and is willing to argue nose-to-nose with Captain Porter to get what she wants as head of the GHOTI Research Division.

The Mythmen

The world wonders -- who are the Mythmen? They may be surprised to know that the mysterious, heroic monsters are secretly a quartet of pubescent geeks (ages 12 to 13) from southwestern Pennsylvania. They do little media work for this reason, preferring to be mysterious benefactors. When an infected Class Zero that Chuck found in a junkyard activated at one of their gaming sessions, they gained hyperpowers and decided to use them to fight crime and defend the Earth. Unfortunately, the "fighting crime" part's been a little hazy -- bank robberies and jewel heists don't happen every day, and there aren't any "supervillains." Still, hope springs eternal. The Mythmen accidentally revealed their

identities to Vince Polosky, Mark and Jenny's dad, who keeps mum and covers for the kids because of a deep-rooted distrust of the government (and thus GHOTI) from his college days. The fact that their secondary bodies are those of young adult humanoids aids in this deception. They have a clubhouse in the junkyard that serves as their "secret HQ."

Ben Goldfarb aka Dragon: Ben is the captain of the junior high chess team and first-chair sax in the band. He's sarcastic and good at math, but girls frighten him. Jenny is his best friend; he has a serious crush on Ragamuffin. As Dragon, he has bat wings, thick armored scales, and can breathe fire (he's learned a number of tricks with this breath weapon, too); his change gives him a cool confidence.

Chuck Insana aka Griffon: Fat kid with a reputation for being a little nuts, Chuck's a class clown. While smart, his grades suffer from his laziness. He's got a thing for Jennifer, and doesn't hide it; however, he's also interested in Sekhmet -- who seems to return his feelings. When he's Griffon, anyway. In his secondary form, he gains hyperstrength, razor claws, and large feathered wings, as well as a modicum of dignity and reserve.

Mark Polosky aka Manticore: Mark wishes he were a real jock. He's on the swim team and the track & field team, but frankly, he sucks. Or at least he did until he got hyperpowers. He has a burning need to fit in, and amongst his friends, he's the one who hates being pegged as a nerd more than anything. He is the quintessential nice guy. As Manticore, he grows leathery red wings, a scorpion-like tail that fires acidic stingers, and can shapeshift. (Note: Manticore human head initially had Mark's features, but the decision to keep their identities secret has led him to change it to resemble something between Adam West and George Reeves.)

Jenny Polosky aka Unicorn: Jenny has the stereotypical "skinny geek chick" coltish look down, topped with long brown hair and huge owl glasses. She's painfully shy, but has a delightful sense of humor. She plays flute and piano well. Ben is her best friend, and she's found she gets along swimmingly with the female members of Stormfront, especially Sekhmet. She likes Chuck, but doesn't like-like him. When she changes to Unicorn, Jenny gains hyperspeed, can teleport herself and up to five other people 100 miles, and her crystalline horn fires powerful energy beams. As Unicorn, she is more outgoing, but not brash like Robotica. She resents her overpowering need to fight Invadroids, seeing it as a loss of control.

Stormfront



(See *Bubbles12's question to Ragamuffin above for more detail on Stormfront's origin.*) Currently, Stormfront is headquartered in a GHOTI research center in Chicago. Their days are heavily scheduled between research, rescue, and media work, but any call for aid against Invadroids takes priority.

Keisha Smith aka Sekhmet: Jumpy and hesitant, Keisha had always been scared. The hardest thing she'd ever done was defy her mother and enter college. An excellent artist, she was pursuing a degree in graphic design when the Class Zero changed her. As Sekhmet, she gains hyperstrength, hyperspeed, razor claws, and telepathic command of animals; furthermore, in her leonine form she's fearless, foolhardy, and a demon in combat. Best-friends with Ragamuffin, she's also close with Unicorn, and romantically interested in Griffon, who clearly is interested. She does substantial animal-rights and environmental PR work.

Nicole Woodman aka Robotica: All her life, Nicole felt she hadn't been enough: not pretty enough, not smart enough, not wild enough, not happy enough. She constantly searched for something, anything to validate herself, and usually came up feeling empty and hurt. Then the nanomachines transformed her into a metal goddess. Covered in gleaming armor, Robotica is hyperbeautiful and hyperstrong, sexually pursued by technophiles (men and women alike), and even metals dance at her whim (metallic telekinesis). After coming out of her coma (see **Timeline: August** above), she's discovered that she can mentally surf the Internet. Indeed, she rarely shifts into her primary body any longer . . . Why should she? (Robotica's metallic body is an anomaly not fully understood by GHOTI researchers -- all

other hyperhumans' secondary bodies are organic in nature. Perhaps Robotica is an example of a Class 2 hyperhuman? She has more hyperpowers than anyone else . . .)

Morgana Raven aka Ragamuffin: Blond, beautiful, dumb, cheerleader. But it wasn't enough. Hell, it wasn't anything, and Morgana knew it. That's why she enrolled in school, to somehow escape the "decaying Homecoming Queen" life laid out for her. The Class Zero was her escape. As Ragamuffin, she's hyperintelligent and hyperagile, and has gained total recall, incredible pain resistance, and invulnerability to kinetic damage (even most of the force of a cutting or stabbing blow is ignored). She's got a crush on the Prof (purely for his mind), and finds Manticore "sexy." Her PR work is aimed at keeping kids in school, but most of her time is spent doing research for GHOTI under Dr. Drexel's direct supervision. After Robotica, she is the hyperhuman who spends the least time in her primary body -- sure, her secondary body is a little outré with all the tattoos, spikes, safety pins, and wild haircuts, but who would voluntarily coop themselves up in a limited mind like Morgana's longer than they had to?

Professor Theodore Storm aka "Prof": Born in Sydney, Australia, Ted Storm wanted nothing more than to read and write his life away. He came to the US to study literature, and hasn't returned Down Under. He holds multiple master's degrees in literature (his specialty is children's fiction), and is great fun to be around. He dotes on his '67 Oldsmobile Toronado 2 door hardtop (named "Ruby"). Levelheaded, affable, and a wicked satirist, he had been working on his Great Australian Novel when an alien weapon dropped into his yard. While he's gained the benefits of transformation, he doesn't have a secondary body, which makes him feel a bit left out. Still, now he's the equal of any Renaissance Man who ever walked the Earth, and that's something, isn't it? He does a lot of PR work (especially adult literacy advocacy) and public appearances for GHOTI; and has recently completed the Geo-Knights basic training course with flying colors; a DL-1 modified by Ragamuffin and painted with the Stormfront logo has been provided for his use.

Items & Locations

Frith Saucer: Frith technology is opaque to Earth science. With few visible or obvious control surfaces in the vessel, the leading theory is that the Frith controlled it with thought alone. This is bolstered due to Project experiments in the early Forties with "remote viewers." Before driven mad by repeated attempts, one psychic was able to activate a holographic animation: the saucer fleeing from a large "organic" ship. Following this sequence is a complex navigation diagram showing their journey to Earth, but analysis of the path has hinted at faster-than-light speeds. The image suddenly cuts off into visible and mental static. An interesting fact discovered by Project data-crunchers in 1998 is that every time a "psychic" enters the saucer, worldwide sightings of UFOs increase. The UFO "boom" of the Seventies and Eighties reflects the intense parapsychological study of the saucer in those decades, fueled by increased sightings of UFOs . . . creating a vicious cycle.

The Zilla Maker (Class 2 Invadroid Builder): Somewhere off the coast of Baja California, hiding under the warm Pacific waters is a humungous, sessile Invadroid attended by dozens of smaller Class 1s. This was a Class 2 named "Punx-Z" that tunneled through the Southwest; finding substantial resources in the ocean, it put down roots and began building King Zilla. It's working on a second Class 3, built around a captured pod of orca and a Chilean canister transport.

PC Opportunities & Story Arcs

PCs have numerous opportunities for adventure in Hyperworld as GHOTI agents, rescue workers, or PR flacks for Stormfront are viable PC group concepts. However, the primary prospect is to play new hyperhumans. Whether the PCs gain their abilities from an infected Class Zero (in a GHOTI lab, a senior citizen home, or elsewhere) or are a handpicked cadre of photogenic Geo-Knights fitted with signature armor (like a cross between GI Joe and the Monkees), the PCs will rapidly become famous worldwide. Interesting role-playing sessions can focus on how to handle fame, hobnobbing with celebrities, working out licensing deals, or using hyperpowers to do something finer than blowing up Invadroids.

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Four Color Physics: Simply, physics and chemistry are "looser" in the reality of Hyperworld. Events that would be dangerous or impossible in the real world aren't, the laws of thermodynamics are really guidelines, and scientific rigor is subordinate to dramatic effect. One way to conceptualize this is to assume that reality operates at a child's level of understanding -- hyperstrength can lift a car without it buckling under its own weight, because a child doesn't worry about internal stresses or materials science. The pitfall to avoid here is making reality too cartoonish.

Realistic Psychology: No matter what fantastic abilities hyperhumans have, they're still people, and are subject to the same thoughts, feelings, and impulses as everyone else. The rest of the world thinks of them just as they would here in the real world; opinions range from paranoia to adoration. One way to envision how folks react to hyperhumans is to imagine them as superstar athletes armed with bazookas. The pitfall to avoid here is adopting a flat "we're for them" or "we're against them" mentality for the public. The existence of hyperhumans causes tremendous controversy, pro and con, with most people somewhere in between.

Back into the Cube

An Alternate Campaign for *GURPS Time Travel* and *Places of Power*

by Baeda

This article gives more structure and purpose to the time traveling campaign found in *GURPS Time Travel* called "In the Cube" (p. 67). It also provides a setting which can incorporate some of the fascinating and mysterious places described in *GURPS Places of Mystery*. While this is written mainly as a campaign, it could be compressed and used as a short one-shot adventure.

The Problem

When the Wanderers get sucked into the Hypercube during the full-power test, they are transported to the date in the past to which the Team had set the Hypercube. Each successive attempt to bring them back home only sends them further and further into the past. They may begin to notice a pattern (or two) to their time jumps.

The first pattern is that each jump sends the Wanderers as far back into the past as they already were. So, if the Wanderers were originally based in 2001 and first jumped to 1789 to witness the French Revolution, then they were 212 years in the past. On their next jump, they will be sent 212 years more into the past, or to 1577. Further jumps would take them back to 1153 (424 years from 1577), 305 AD, 1391 BC, and so forth. Whether or not they discover the progression, it should be obvious to them that they are moving further and further into the past. (If the GM prefers, this numerical progression can be ignored -- the important thing is that the Wanderers are moving further away from home with each jump.)

The second, and more important pattern, is that each time the Wanderers arrive in a new time, they find themselves in one of the locations found in *GURPS Places of Mystery*. The nature and type of the locations should be different enough that the pattern does not become too obvious until after a few jumps (for example, they shouldn't land in a temple or church every time).

The Solution

The Hypercube cannot get a close enough fix upon the Wanderers to transfer them back, and the further back in time they are, the more difficult is the fix. Thus each failure results in sending the Wanderers as far back into the past as they already were, relative to where they were before the jump. When the Hypercube tries to fix upon and transfer people within too large and unfocused an area, it fails in mid-transfer lacking the energy to complete the transfer. Rather than just wasting all the built up energy for the transfer following the failure, the energy is put to use by the Hypercube to send the Wanderers back as far as they wanted to come forward.

As the Hypercube transfers the Wanderers, certain locations tend to attract the matter which has newly entered the time sphere. If one were to view it from the perspective of an electron, it would look almost like the forces of electromagnetic attraction. These places have an aura of energy about them, and might be called "places of power." Many of these places have become revered over the years as holy places, since some people can sense the aura of energy. Some people have built edifices to cover, surround or adorn them. Many of these places are now marked in some way, and are described in *GURPS Places of Mystery*. These places of power can include anything the GM chooses; any place or building considered to be "holy" by any religion was probably felt to radiate an aura of energy, as well as certain natural locations (like mountain tops) which can be said to radiate such an aura.

The solution to the Wanderer's problem is to place themselves on or within such places of power. This allows the Hypercube to fix on them more accurately and bring them forward in time. In fact, if the Wanderers could just stay in

the same place as they landed, they would move forward on their next jump. Unfortunately, something usually comes up which forces the Wanderers to move from their landing location.

Once the PCs (Wanderers or the Team back at home) discover the pattern, and place themselves in places of power for their transfers, they will start to move forward in their jumps. They will move forward at the same rate they moved back, only in reverse (ie. they will move back half of the time distance from their home time; round fractions down). This will allow the PCs to revisit every time they have previously visited (sometimes arriving at the same location as before, sometimes at another location in the same time), which could present its own difficulties. The Wanderers will jump forward at this same rate until the time difference between their current location and home time is a prime number (to simplify and shorten this process, just make it an odd number).

As described in the *GURPS Time Travel* campaign "In the Cube," it is possible to communicate with the PCs, and even send them equipment, with this minor snag: The further in the past they are, the harder it is to make a direct fix on the party unless they are located in a place of power. What this means, in practical terms, is that the calculations required for the Team at home to make contact with the Wanderers after a jump is subject to one further calculation: multiply the number of hours required to make contact by the number of years into the past the Wanderers are, divided by 500 (rounded up). Essentially, this means that you increase the multiplier by one every 500 years. Thus a party 500-1000 years in the past must multiply the time required by 2.

Sending matter to the Wanderers is even more problematic. The further back in time they are, the wider is the area of possible delivery, unless the wanderers are in a place of power. For every year in the past, the possible delivery area increases by a radius of a foot. Thus, when the Team sends matter 100 years into the past, it will land within 100 cubic feet of the Wanderers (this might mean the materials "land" anywhere up to 100 feet above them, or even 100 feet below them, requiring them to dig them up, as well as up to 100 feet in any horizontal direction). When contact is re-established after the transfer of materials, the Team at home will be able to locate the "package" and direct the Wanderers to it, but by the time they get to it, it may have been found by someone else already, and be under investigation or guard!

Running the Campaign

At the character creation session to start the campaign, tell the players to design scientists who work on a time travel machine. Then ask them where they would want to go on their first foray into the past. When they come back for the next session, you can begin like this: "Today is the big day -- you're going to power up the Hypercube. Soon it will be ready for 'live' testing, but today is just a warm up. As the test begins, the guy at the controls asks you what date to put into the machine -- 'just for fun,' he says. You tell him [the date the players gave you at the first session], with a laugh. The next thing you know, you are being dragged into a vacuum created by the Hypercube." For their first adventure, the players will get to experience the time and place they chose. After that, they will have no control over where they land.

Once begun, this campaign does not differ too much in style and function from what is presented in "In the Cube." It will still center mainly on the Wanderers' survival from jump to jump, and the real action may take place while they are out of contact with the Team back home. The real difference is the potential difficulties that could arise if the Wanderers go too far back in time -- for example, having to traipse halfway across the earth in dinosaur times to retrieve "a package from home." If they go too far back it might become more difficult to find places of power, since there won't be any buildings before humans. The GM should play up this danger as the PCs get further and further in the past.

Further Possibilities

The Director of the TRU

If all the PCs are going to be Wanderers, then it might simplify things for them to deal with a single individual (who

has research assistants, of course). That individual could be one Niels Johannson.

Dr. Niels Johannson (100 pts)

5'11", 150 lbs blue eyes, blond hair, Scandinavian features, usually dressed in suit and lab coat.

ST 10 [0] **DX** 9 [-10] **IQ** 15 [60] **HT** 10 [0]

Speed: 4.75 Move: 4

Advantages: Literacy [0], Lightning Calculator [5], Reputation (+2 among other scientists and academics) [7]

Disadvantages: Impulsiveness [-10], Stubbornness [-5]

Quirks: Wants to achieve fame as a great scientist (like Newton or Einstein); Always wears a three button suit under his lab coat; Has trouble falling asleep at night; A little clumsy; Likes to read history. [-5]

Skills: Mathematics-14 [2], Computer Operation/TL8-15 [1], Computer Programming/TL8-12 [.5], Electronics-15 [4], Electronics Operation/TL8-15 [2], Electrical Engineering/TL8-16 [6] Physics/TL8-16 [8], Nuclear Physics/TL8-15 [8], Temporal Electronics/TL8-15 [4], Temporal Operation-15 [2], Temporal Physics-15 [8], Swimming-10 [2], Skiing - 10 [8]

Languages: Swedish (Native)-15 [0], English (MA)-14 [1], German (MA)-14 [1], French (MA)-13 [.5]

Dr. Johannson is the stereotypical scientist: all brains, no brawn. Born in Sweden to a father who was a chemist and a mother who taught mathematics at the secondary level, he discovered early on his natural ability with mathematics, and a love for designing and building machines. He also enjoyed reading history books, but only when he couldn't get his hands on the materials to build a new machine he had dreamt up. Even in his younger years, he rarely made himself available for outside activities, preferring his machines and his theories, but his parents did make him take swimming lessons as a kid, and later they took him on vacation skiing trips where he managed, despite a slight natural tendency towards clumsiness, to learn to stay up on the skis and make it to the bottom of the hill.

By the time he reached college, he had decided to study electrical and computer engineering. In the course of his studies he was introduced to the field of temporal physics, still in its infancy, but growing. When he decided to continue his studies with post-graduate work, he applied to work and study under an American professor at an American university, where there was more funding for such specialized fields than in Sweden. By the time he had earned his PhD, he had become one of the leading experts in time travel theory, and wanted to begin working to make it a reality. He joined the Time Research Unit, but after several years of all discussing theory, he, along with a few others, decided to do something about it. With all of his experience with both electrical and temporal engineering, he naturally become the leader of the small group which eventually built the Hypercube. It was his impulsive nature which led him to join the group which built the Hypercube, and it may have been his impulsive nature which led him to try the full- power test against the advice of the others and which ultimately led to the "accident." He now stubbornly refuses to accept the loss of those who were sucked in, and keeps trying to bring them back, despite the repeated failures.

Quotes: "This time it will work, you'll see!"

"Someday, they'll repeat my name along with those of Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein!"

What if creation "ex nihilo" is true?

If the assertion by some religions that the earth is only about 6000 years old today, and was created "ex nihilo" (out of nothing), is true the campaign world, then what happens when the Wanderers are sent back further in time than that? Perhaps the Hypercube cannot find a location for them and so they are stuck in limbo forever, or at least until a team (new PCs run by the old players?) can figure out how to rescue them. Perhaps they are transported to the next closest place of power -- in another galaxy! Or maybe they just land in empty space, dying after a couple of minutes of no

oxygen, or maybe they are rescued by a passing starship just in the nick of time. This could transform the campaign into a *Space* campaign.

Mirror of Hidden Truth, Soulbreaker, and Weeping Wounds

Three Artifacts For *In Nomine*

by Elizabeth McCoy

(While these are all relics for [In Nomine](#), alternate forms of them are also listed, suitable for fantasy games.)

While most relics are created by a celestial or a celestial's Superior -- with a few notable ethereal items thrown in for good measure -- there are always the artifacts which . . . just happen. Whether by an Intervention or simply odd concatenations of events, something pops up which was not enchanted, but *made*.

The Mirror of Hidden Truth

As the legend goes, long ago, before Judgment and Fire were at odds with each other, there was a Seraph of Dominic who had earned enough favor with Gabriel that he -- Gabriel was male then -- gave the Seraph Fire's own Choir Attunement. This allowed the Seraph to see those who lied to themselves about what they were, and combined with her Choir Attunements of Judgment, made her one of the best triad-leaders that the Word had known. But between her attunement of Fire, and her own Lord's dissonance conditions, she was equally unable to dispense mercy when it was called for.

And one day, it was. She and her triad thought they were going to bring in a demon who was responsible for the Falls of several angels. Instead, they found a repentant Balseraph who sincerely threw himself upon their mercy. This, by itself, would not have been a problem -- but the Balseraph was a minion of Asmodeus, Prince of the Game, and had just "lost" two Renegade demons. The Balseraph was Discordant from his betrayal of his Hellish master, Bound into the ring of keys that had unlocked his dungeon's doors, and could not follow the angels to their Hearts (even if the Light of Heaven would not have grievously wounded him), and the team to "collect" the Renegades would be there shortly. If the Balseraph were found missing, the hunt would be up immediately . . .

When the Game-team showed up for the missing demons, they found a tall, lean Balseraph -- or so they thought. Seraphim, as a rule, are not good at lying. The dissonance of it hurts them, and they don't have practice. Nevertheless, the Seraph-in-Balseraph's-clothing managed to fool the team, stalling and delaying, and binding her dissonance into Discord before it could fracture his Heart. Ironically, she, too, became Bound -- to her silver Mirror of Truth that could (with a little Essence) reflect the celestial forms of those visible in it.

And so it was that she could not flee to his Heart in Heaven when the Prince of the Game arrived. The Seraph dropped her pretense and attacked the Prince as best she could, for each precious moment of delay meant her triad could be that much closer to safety. But it was fatal for her; the Prince summoned to him the blade Soulbreaker, and struck down the Seraph, soul-killing her even as she was drawn into the mirror she was Bound to by her Discord.

The mirror stayed in the possession of Servitors of the Game for a while, was stolen by a demon of Theft, and finally wound up . . . where ever the Game Master decides.

In appearance, it's not much. Just a silver mirror (which probably needs polishing), about the size of two human palms. The power of the Mirror of Hidden Truths is this: it shows what someone *is*, and is becoming, especially if that person is denying self-knowledge. For humans, this means that those gazing in the mirror will be reflected, not *sans* disguises, but in such a way that the disguise is compromised. Further, their true personality will also show through, no matter the facade they project. If a king is becoming a tyrant, it will show him as such. If a Scrooge has had a change of

heart, that, too, will be obvious.

For celestials, it is the same, though it does not display celestial forms unless given Essence (as per a standard Mirror of Truth, p. 66 of the *Liber Reliquarum*) -- with one exception. If an angel is close to Falling, or a demon becoming redeemable, they (and any other viewers!) will see their Fallen or redeemed celestial form in the mirror, not their current one, nor their vessel. This can be, as they say, disconcerting.

Other Mirrors of Hidden Truth

In a non-*In Nominated* world, the legends around the mirror may still include an angel of truth giving its life to save someone who sought purity. Or there may be mystical orders which delve into the Illuminated truths of the world, and use this enchanted mirror to see within a person's soul. It reflects the true nature of a human, as above, and sees through all disguises -- even (or especially) magical illusions. (Self-hypnotism, so that one *believes* one is what one pretends to be, is a possible counter for the mirror. The images it reflects of someone so deluded might be enigmatic.) If werebeasts or spirits come within range of it, they will be automatically revealed only if they are on the road to changing their state somehow -- lunar cycles may reveal the other-form of a were-creature just before a change hits, for example. Non-humans in human form may also be reflected truly if the mirror's holder murmurs the appropriate incantation and pays a cost in magical energies (Fatigue in *GURPS*, Gnosis or Willpower in *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, etc.).

Soulbreaker

Once there was a Calabite, one of the Destroying demons, who was a Marquis of Lust. His name is not important, and might even be dangerous to know. He had a talent for violence, and sex, and combining them, and the Prince of Lust sponsored him to Lucifer for the Word of Pleasure From Other's Pain. However, when the Lightbringer visited this Marquis, the demon had other ambitions. The Word he asked for -- and received -- would most concisely translate as "Snuff Films" (save that there were no such things when this happened).

Needless to say, the Prince of Lust was not entirely pleased by this turn of events. Andrealphus is an Impudite, and Impudites hate to see humans wasted by death. So the Marquis lost the favor of his Prince, and eventually . . . well, it might have been merely a Servitor of the Game trying to meet quota, but the Demon of "Snuff Films" was accused of plotting treason against his Prince and taken to the dungeons of Hades. Andrealphus shrugged his sinful shoulders and did not speak in the Marquis' defense, and so the Calabite was sentenced to death.

However, Asmodeus and Andrealphus do not get along well. Asmodeus had no wish to do the other Prince any favors by ridding him of a Word-bound who did not please Lust. So instead of merely killing the Marquis, the Prince bound him into a sword. The sword-Demon of "Snuff Films" was stripped of any ability to resist the will of whoever held it, and any way to communicate of its own volition.

Soulbreaker had a long and terrible -- if not very distinguished -- career as Asmodeus' favorite weapon. But in the battle with Makatiel, Renegade Prince of Disease, it was broken. The missing piece (the blade's phallic point) was never recovered, and while Asmodeus attempted repairs . . . it just wasn't the same. He presented it to one of his underlings, who eventually gifted it to one of his minions, and so on, until it was thoroughly lost. Who knows where it might turn up now?

In appearance, Soulbreaker is a blunt-tipped, heavy broadsword, a little short and off-balance from its breakage. The crosspieces are, indeed, suggestive of the blade's Lust-demon heritage. Only those with a Strength of 11+ can wield it with any grace (subtract 2 from Accuracy for every point of Strength below 11), but it is still a vicious weapon, with Power +7. Its true threat to celestials is that it does Soul Hits *equal* to Body Hits, and it will strip Forces. The only requirement is that the last Force before soul-death can only be claimed by a thrusting attack (at -5 to skill; the tip is blunt and more inclined to bruise than stab).

Other Soulbreakers

Soul-eating swords are, alas, common in many fantasy settings. Soulbreaker is really one of a horde without its demonic origins. Of course, it might get more interesting if the sword's owner exuded a dark charisma, drawing the interest of those around him (or her). Inflicting bloodlust or berserker rages on the owner is hardly necessary for appropriate evil, since the only way to become the owner is to use it to kill the victim one is having sex with, at the moment of one's own climax. Merely using it in battle won't have any ill effects -- except a tendency toward dreams of the ritual above . . .

(In *GURPS* terms, Soulbreaker should be considered a very fine (p. B74, sidebar) bastard sword (p. B206), with a Minimum ST of 15! It has +5 to damage, above and beyond the +2 for a very fine weapon.)

Weeping Wounds

When the tip of Soulbreaker snapped off, it was lodged within the form of the Demon Prince of Disease. As the Renegade Prince tried to escape, the tip was thrown free . . .

There are many stories about which notable blacksmith found the blade, and how he (or she) re-forged it into a greenish bladed dagger. The truth doesn't matter -- Weeping Wounds' power works without incantations or intent.

Whenever the dagger does even a hit of damage (in celestial, ethereal, or corporeal combat!), the wound it deals never truly heals. It may seal over, but the infection remains, and eventually will break through and ooze. Blood poisoning is almost inevitable; treat as a Strength/3, Speed/1 disease (p. 124 of the *Corporeal Player's Guide*) which will not heal! The Corporeal Song of Healing or appropriate Medicine rolls will cure the hits, but the infection merely lies dormant for a week or so -- and then returns. Only a Superior can remove the dagger's taint.

Celestials are less affected -- the infection is unlikely to *kill* their vessels. Still, they suffer a variant of the Stigmata Discord, but with a pus-weeping wound instead of a bloody one. As above, only a Superior's attention will remove the infection entirely.

Holding the weapon is not terribly dangerous, save for an increased tendency to catch colds or whatever minor flu bugs are going around.

Other Weeping Wounds

Again, a traditional weapon which deals out a "never-healing wound," though not one which will cause the victim to die from blood loss. (Blood loss is too *quick*.) The cure will require not just magical healing, but holy magical healing! (GM's option as to what counts as "holy.") Otherwise, it just keeps coming back. Modern medicine may decide that it is some new form of AIDS or cancer, and attempt to treat it as such . . .

Pyramid Review

War! Age of Imperialism

Published by [Eagle Games](#)

Designed by Glen Drover

Boxed wargame; \$49.99

War! Age of Imperialism is a game of Grand Strategy set during the Colonial Expansion period of the 19th century. It is very much in the spirit of the old Gamemaster series by Milton Bradley (*Axis & Allies*, *Shogun*, etc.) much loved for its ease of play as well as the little plastic pieces that have coaxed many a non-gaming friend into playing. Fans of that series should definitely check out this game.

The box itself is well-illustrated and the box's contents live up to its promise. The board is large with ample room for the pieces (no crowded piles of little men here) and is as much a work of art as it is a functional playing board. The rules and all supporting documentation are nicely printed on good quality paper and card stock. There are over 800 pieces, including European infantry (modeled after Zulu War British), cavalry, and artillery, tribal infantry (Zulus) and cavalry (Middle Eastern) as well as leaders, explorers, ships, and engineers. It also includes buildings such as ports, cities, schools, factories, and forts. The military units are in 1/72 scale to enable easy supplementation with other miniatures.

The rules themselves are broken into basic, standard, and advanced games. Games with graduated levels of complexity are not uncommon; however, in this case the more advanced rules are not simply additions to the basic rules. Each level changes the way the game is played so that there are almost three different games. For example, each has its own combat system. There is enough continuity, however, that playing more basic levels of the game still gives familiarity with the system and can be used to move non-gaming friends into increasingly more advanced play. The rules are clear and well written, and also comprehensive while remaining an easy read.

Game play is fast-paced, with the turn passing from player to player fairly quickly. The system allows the players to each move and fight (or explore) in turn once, then again, before tallying money and making purchases. This feature of having one simultaneous purchase round every two movement rounds slows the game to a pace more realistic for the era than the traditional purchase-every-turn method would. Since losses are not quickly replaced there are no blitzkriegs, but rather more careful planning and maneuvering to acquire particular territories.

The game begins with the players each having four to ten territories (depending on the number of players). The rest of the territories each contain two hidden markers -- a native strength marker and a resource marker. Explorer pieces can enter these territories and flip over the markers displaying the natural resources available (many territories will have none) and the strength of the natives (a number from 4-12). The explorer then rolls two dice to see if the natives can be coaxed through diplomatic means to join the empire. A roll equal to or greater than the native number means the territory capitulates and joins the empire. A failed roll equals a dead explorer. Any resources in the area may or may not become available as income immediately depending on which level of rules is being played. A player may decide to invade the territory and reduce it by force, but the natives can be extremely strong and this is only done after careful planning.

The role of buildings in the game is hard to describe in general terms, since they change significantly at each level. In all the levels, however, buildings generate income and are required to place certain units. In the basic game, that's about it. In the advanced game, however, the rules are more subtle and elegant. For example, the amount of income each port produces is based on how many other ports the player has. Another example is that a railroad gets points



based on how many cities, factories, ports, and resources it joins. Since only one building is allowed per territory (except forts which generate no income, but can be placed anywhere) good long-term planning is required to make optimum use of them.

Combat is quick and simple, with each level of rules having a different system. In general they all include both attacker and defender rolling dice (2d6), and adding bonuses with the loser removing a piece (his choice or opponent's choice depends on the level of play). The standard and advanced rules are vastly more satisfying as there is a bonus for having combined arms. For each of the four arms (infantry, cavalry, artillery, leader) that a side has present at the battle, that side gets a +1 to the dice roll. They also both include technological advancement bonuses, with the advanced rules being far more complex at this point than the regular.

War! Age of Imperialism is a truly good game. It does, however, have its downsides. First is a need for more scenarios. Only one is included in the game. Without these, setup is totally unrestricted and can feature empires based in West Africa exploring the wilds of France. The game doesn't actually produce the situation of the 19th century, which was an industrialized Europe sending out armies and products to colonies that are never up to the same industrial level as the homeland. The game also needs to have more concrete victory conditions. Neither tallying regions controlled after a preset number of turns or after a certain passage of real time (as in the basic and standard game) nor the more complex tallying of points based on regions, buildings, and pieces in the advanced game is as satisfying as driving toward a more distinct goal. A final downside to the game is that the basic game is really too basic for most gamers and should really only be used as an introduction to the game, played through a few turns. The lack of combined arms and technology bonuses renders the European battle advantage nil. This makes most of the native territories incredibly powerful and pushes the Europeans to fight each other over those territories that were weak enough to surrender to an explorer.

Game designer Glen Drover has done an excellent job with this game. It is a lot of fun. The flaws are easily corrected with house rules (and what gamer would be comfortable without a few house rules?) and the promised future supplement (if this game sells well enough) should cure most of these ills. It is to include a map expansion (adding the New World), two more players (up to 8), random event cards, optional rules, more scenarios, and other features. It would also make a good strategic game for a colonial miniatures campaign. It is definitely recommended.

--*Stephen Coney*

Pyramid Review

Dinosaur Planet: Broncosaurus Rex (for d20)

Published by [Goodman Games](#)

Written by Joseph Goodman

Illustrated by Tim Burgard, Derek Schubert, V. Shane, Walter Stuart, David Wong and Thomas Yeates

96 pages; \$20.00

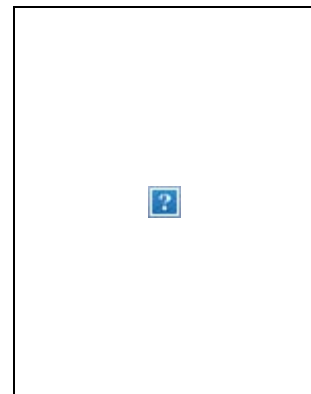
Take one part Old West, one part American Civil War, and inject both into the big fleshy parts of a dinosaur or two, before adding a heavy sprinkle of space going Science Fiction and plugging this soggy mixture into the *d20* System, and what have you got? Cowboys and dinosaurs and . . . Oh my! Or rather *Dinosaur Planet: Broncosaurus Rex*, a new *d20* system setting that returns to the genre last visited by *GURPS Dinosaurs* and GDW's *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs RPG*, based upon the comic *Xenozoic Tales* by Mark Schultz.

The setting for *Broncosaurus Rex* is Cretasus in the year 2202. Cretasus is a large Jupiter-sized planet with an Earth-like atmosphere and climate, as well as being only a 1-G world. Twenty large valleys, each with different range of flora and fauna last seen when dinosaurs walked the Earth; dominate the planet's surface. Further, many of the dinosaur species are intelligent enough that they can be domesticated, trained as riding beasts or even form tool-using tribes of their own. No single political faction dominates Cretasus, though because of its abundant mineral and biological resources, both the Federal Union of Planets and the Confederate States of America would like to do so.

Although it is not made clear initially, *Broncosaurus Rex* is actually set within the future of an alternate history. The American Civil War ended in stalemate and a long cold war, with Abraham Lincoln having been assassinated two years before he could make his emancipation proclamation at Gettysburg -- although the Confederacy did free their slaves in 1881. Later it was the more adventurous nature of the Confederacy that landed a man on the Moon and the rivalry between North and South that was the War Between The States became the War Between The Planets, with both fighting for possession of the Martian colonies. When the Union discovered the first Warp Gate, both sides rushed to explore the worlds found beyond and establish more colonies.

Unfortunately, the Confederacy found itself stretched too thin defending both its territories at home and off world. Before it could be fully conquered by the Union, all those that could, made the great exodus, fleeing to their colonies in as many ships as they could. It is their stubborn nature and their ingenuity that has kept their many colonies from being taken in the face of Union industrial might and technological superiority. On Earth, the Union absorbed the other nations into the Federal Union of Nations, though some -- like the United Kingdom, France, and China -- resisted but also fled. Without colonies of their own, they each formed roving fleets of city-sized ships, now known as the Free Fleets.

One problem with *Broncosaurus Rex* is that you do not really learn that it is an alternate history until you are several pages in, which does leave you scratching your head. Fortunately, once you get to this point and beyond, the author's style is engaging and really gets you into the spirit of the setting. That said, he does show a decided bias throughout towards the Confederacy. Despite the book looking a little thin, there is little wasted space and the artwork is pretty good, especially the dinosaurs by Tim Burgard. One major omission, since this introduces the setting, is the utter lack of a map of Cretasus.



Despite the over-arching science fiction setting, which in *Broncosaurus Rex* is barely discussed, the action is set mainly on Cretasus. Further this is purely a human-centric game; in other words, not an Elf, Dwarf, Halfling, or other funny-looking pointy-eared freaks in sight. Characters are all human, and while there are aliens out there in explored space, they do not appear on Cretasus. And anyway, it is inferred that they would appear as NPCs rather than for use as player characters. Instead of "Race" and Class being the difference between characters, it is "Place of Origin" and Class that make the difference. Because all characters are human, they do not gain the extra feat that they would in the basic *d20* System.

Players select their Place of Origin from a choice of Confederacy, the Union, and the Free Fleet, as well as a fourth, Offworlders, who are characters that hail from primitive worlds along the frontier. Each origin provides feats or skill bonuses, as well as determining what level of technology a character has access to. A Confederate character gains an extra feat to reflect their individualistic heroism, a bonus to their animal skills from their rural upbringing, start with an heirloom weapon; while they have limited access to technology, it is invariably well-made and of decent construction. Union characters have easy access to high technology, though it is mass-manufactured and of poorer quality, start the game with extra skill points to reflect their education, have bonuses to their intelligence and Use Equipment skills. Union characters also have access to Ironclads, powered armor suits based on plundered alien technology, which are unfortunately not specifically detailed in this book. Powered armor is given, but whether that is what is known as Ironclads is not made clear. As the setting's premier merchants, Free Worlders have bonuses to their Appraise and Knowledge skills, decent access to technology, and a Dexterity bonus. Given their frontier origins, Offworlders have poor access to technology, receive bonuses to their Strength and Constitution, as well as their Wilderness Lore and Intuit Direction skills, but penalties to their intelligence and charisma.

In addition to dropping the fantasy races, none of the classes from the *Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook* appear in *Broncosaurus Rex*. There are six new classes, which include the Bronco Rider -- dinosaur herders, riders and trainers that are capable of fighting from a mount; Machinists, able to construct, alter and use items of technology, including modifying weapons to give them damage and targeting bonuses; Soldiers, whose feats concentrate on tactics and strategy to gain advantages over their opponents; Spies, which are the equivalent to Rogues, but orientated to getting information of people without their knowledge through slip of the tongue, in addition to being able to dodge bullets and generally be lucky; Soldiers, Two-Fisters, who aren't disciplined fighters like Soldiers but instead are better at street-fighting and -- because they come from similar backgrounds -- better at getting information out of the locals; and finally there are the Wild Ones. These are those that find themselves more at home in the wilds, finding companionship with animals, including dinosaurs!

Broncosaurus Rex, like any other *d20* system setting book, reworks and adds skills and feats. Most of the skill reworking is an updating to a more modern setting, such as Alchemy to Chemistry, and both Animal Empathy and Ride to apply to dinosaurs also. New skills include Ciphers, Drive, Operate Ironclad (available to Union Machinists and Soldiers only), and the key to using any high tech gear, Use Technical Equipment. The weapon feats include Manual, Ballistic, High-Tech, and Alien. With the High-Tech Weapon Proficiency, a character can use the energy guns in the game, including sonic, laser, plasma, freeze, and gravity types, whereas the Alien Weapon Proficiency requires a player to list a specific weapon that they can use. Other feats include Dinopathy, which allows rudimentary communication with dinosaurs through body language and +2 to the Animal Empathy skill for dinosaurs, while the Dinosaur Presence gives a character personal magnetism with dinosaurs. While many of the other feats are general, there are plenty that are specific to confederate characters only. These include Great Lover, Gentry, and Rebel Yell, yet while these allow a player to better roleplay a confederate character, it is a great shame that there are none given for characters of other origins. Perhaps the potential *Broncosaurus Rex* referee should raid other *d20* system sourcebooks for such feats; I can imagine that the recent *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook* from Fantasy Flight Games would be useful in this regard.

The major difference in technology between our own and that of *Broncosaurus Rex* is that digital technology, and thus the computer was never developed. Also, FTL travel remains a province of unknown alien races, with humanity traveling at sub-light speeds. The suggestion is that technology is heavy, clunky, and that the cog is highly prevalent. One problem is that none of it is illustrated, barring the laser sword wielded by the dino rider on the front cover. The setting has tech-levels, which act as a guideline as to what tech a character has access to. Most of the equipment in *Broncosaurus Rex* is a long list of fun guns. These range from the humble .45 calibre pistol through narrow and wide

beam lasers, to truly deadly alien weapons such as the Annihilator (an antimatter rifle), the Dust Gun, the Disintegrator (which includes rules for taking out limbs), and the Chimera, which disrupts the targets DNA with bursts of radiation! Thankfully, for those who do lose limbs to the Dust Gun, *Broncosaurus Rex* includes rules for bionic replacements. All energy weapons are powered by power packs, and in some cases provide just enough for a single shot with some of the more extreme weapons. Likewise, energy packs power a range of Energy Field Armours, which are more effective against energy weapons, but can be stacked with the various normal types of physical armor. The remainder of the equipment section lists various weapon add-ons, tools, and items useful in riding and training dinosaurs, before looking at bionics and robots.

The chapter on dinosaurs lists over twenty of these beasts, but not as monsters. No, in *Broncosaurus Rex* they are creatures of varying intelligence such as the Parasaurolophus, with an Intelligence of 2 that is herded by ranchers for their meat, to the Protoceratops, with an Intelligence of 14 who act as the diplomats amongst Cretasus' dinosaurs. It is the Velociraptor -- or more correctly the Deinonychus, which the author points out has been popularized by a certain dinosaur movie as the Velociraptor -- that gets the most coverage, as they can be written as full NPCs with levels as warriors, shaman, and tacticians. As written, the player characters can interact with most of the intelligent dinosaurs and some tribes even take alliances with humans and trade with them for weapons. Besides describing each dinosaur in combat and the nature of their society, each entry also tells what by-products can be harvested from each species, from organs to bones and eggs, as well as how difficult it is for someone to actually train them as riding animals.

The last chapter in *Broncosaurus Rex* is slim, but provides some basic adventuring ideas for gaming on Cretasus. This is essentially an examination of the motivations for the various factions on the planet, including both humans and dinosaurs. It is rounded out with a hundred adventure ideas, which although no more than a line or two each, should help the referee get started.

Broncosaurus Rex is something very different for the *d20* system -- a pulp adventure game that in places uses the rules to enforce some cultural background. It is a real shame though that this enforcement is geared totally in favor of Confederate characters and against those of Union origins. Cretasus presents plenty of scope for Old West style adventure, although referees wanting to take their game off-world should look at *Dragonstar: The Starfarer's Handbook* for the rules, if not the setting. For that I would suggest possibly the *Cities in Flight* series by James Blish and the merchant ships from Robert Heinlein's *Citizen of the Galaxy* as inspiration for Free Worlder characters and adventure.

If you are a fan of the *d20* system, but want a change from the fantasy of *Dungeons & Dragons*, then *Broncosaurus Rex* really will offer you that change. It has something for everyone -- cowboys and dinosaurs and big guns, but most of all, "Yeeee-Haaa" fun!

--Matthew Pook

When Spacefleet Won't Return Your Phone Calls

I'm not here.

This column is being written mere minutes after last week's installment, because, as foretold last week, I'm home. (At least, I *should* be. If Mothra crawled out of the sea and destroyed Ft. Lauderdale in the past seven days, my fate may be up in the air. But hopefully Gamera will save us; Gamera is friend to all children.)

And, for all I know, everything may be falling apart.

The *Pyramid* [message boards](#), unread and unmoderated by me in days, could be awash in off-topic posts, flame wars, and bawdy limericks about me. A screaming mass of angry subscribers may be marching on Austin now. An evil doppelganger may be impersonating me in the chat rooms . . . um . . . idling evilly. I wouldn't know.

Which leads me to one of my favorite dirty GM tricks: leave the kids unsupervised.

Many (if not most) campaigns have some sort of hierarchy; *Vampire* has its feudal Prince system, *Star Trek* has captains and admirals, and even most gaming groups have a party leader or spokesman. After a while most teams come to value and trust their hierarchy, patron, or other guiding hands . . . they even come to rely on them. Which makes them ideal, of course, to be taken away.

It's a technique I've used multiple times, and each time has been successful. (Or, at least, my players have never stabbed me in frustration from this plot device . . .) For example, in our long-running *Fading Suns* game, I was taking over as GM for a year-long storyline. Ordinarily my character was a noble and the team leader, and for the first part of the storyline he still was. But then he was seemingly killed in the second adventure, leaving the other two players on their own in the middle of an epic adventure. Oh, and my now-gone character held certain secrets and knowledge of their overall mission that the other characters didn't have. Good luck!

Done properly, taking away the group's supervision is a great way to really mix things up in a campaign.

What happens if the starship captain is sent by Space Command to a crucial planet to await further orders . . . only to find their communications cut off once they get there?

What if the Vampire Prince leaves the city, and a problem erupts that (seemingly) only he can handle?

What if the heroes are given ceremonial control of a fantasy fair, city, or kingdom . . . and the person who would relinquish that control immediately dies or disappears?

What if, in the middle of an assignment, the espionage group finds evidence that its agency has sent its agents on a seeming suicide mission? And now the agency is trying to establish contact to see how things are going . . .

Removing that cushion of hierarchy can really challenge heroes (and their players), making shy characters act in leadership roles, pushing followers into making command decisions, and forcing groups to make the best of an ugly situation.

Now, the biggest problem (in my experience) is getting rid of that supervisory helping hand. After all, if they're so powerful, cool, and all-wise, why are they leaving the heroes in the lurch?

Well, here are some ideas.

- **The supervisors are still around, but unavailable.** If the Magic Talkie Box you use to communicate with the homebase is eaten by rats, then your options to get in touch with them are limited. This option is so common it almost goes without saying . . . but it's always a good idea to mention the classics.
- **The supervisors are around, but they can't be trusted.** If the heroes are in the course of investigating

something serious and discover evidence (or seeming evidence) that their own Patron may be behind it, this can effectively sever ties with their Patron.

For example, the group is given a mission by their Patron. During that mission they're attacked by agents (ideally suicide agents or other non-tale-telling folks); afterwards the heroes acquire evidence that their own Patron may have sent the agents to attack them!

Well, now the heroes have a conundrum; do they continue their Patron-given mission, hoping that all will be revealed? Do they start investigating the Patron? Do they confront the Patron with the evidence of their attack?

- **The supervisors have a mission that requires them to cut contact.** This can be a more "upfront" version of using this plot device. For example, if Spacefleet Academy believes they have been infiltrated, the heroes might be given a mission to enter the organization incognito, and given specific orders *not* to file reports or make contact until after the matter is resolved.
- **The supervisors have a mission that requires them to cut contact *without* the heroes knowing.** This can be especially appropriate if the supervisor *knows* the heroes will act a certain way if they know all the facts. For example, if a selfless wizard patron is dying of a strange illness, and he sends the heroes on a quest to retrieve a magical cure-all spell scroll that will save the inept King's life (because that is the good thing to do), he may well disappear abruptly and without warning to remove the temptation of having the heroes use the spell on him.
- **The supervisors are evil!** Whether suffering from a temporary bout of Space Madness or part of the Evil Überconspiracy, the supervisors may set up the heroes in a difficult situation, then leave them in the lurch.
- **The supervisors are unable to help, and unable to say they can't help.** This can be especially appropriate if the supervisors have supervisors, is forced into silence by a curse, or is simply honor-bound in this circumstance to withdraw aid.

Of course, the best technique may depend on your campaign, and mix-and-matching these ideas (or coming up with something entirely different!) will probably provide the best results. For example, the heroes may be (unknowingly) set up by the patron for a crime they didn't commit, in the hopes they will be able to uncover a sinister plot brewing the prison they will be sentenced. Fortunately, one member of the party knows the full story, and will be able to tell the heroes at an appropriate time. Unfortunately, that member is killed in a prison riot shortly after getting there, leaving the heroes alone and uninformed. Hilarity ensues . . .

There are probably two big challenges in creating and running this kind of adventure. First, without the usual guidance of their supervisors, such adventures generally need to be much more open-ended; you can't rely on the out of having a nudging hand push the heroes along.

Second, and perhaps more challenging, you probably want to craft the adventure such that there is minimal bad blood between the advisors and the heroes once the matter is resolved. And you need to prepare for the possibility that the heroes will feel betrayed and abandoned . . . perhaps enough to break ties with the supervisors altogether. If you aren't prepared for the possibility of the heroes breaking ties with Spacefleet Academy and forging their own destinies, you may not want to run one of these adventures.

This second challenge is pretty big, and there's enough involved that I might write another column about it at some point.

But not today.

Because I'm not here.

--Steven Marsh

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(And don't forget! I'm be holding two chats on Tuesday, February 26th! Check out <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/chat.html> for more information . . .)

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Once Upon A Time** (Second Edition), instruction booklet p. 7.*

*(Three stars) "When the white light strikes the victim, he (or she) screams horribly -- a long, drawn-out wailing scream. As your vision clears, an image of the character, pale and ghostly, streams out of the body and toward the **Soul Gem** getting smaller the nearer it gets."*

Beyond Contagion and Remove Disease

Optional Disease Rules for d20

by Daniel Bronson

Lara stood with her companions at the top of a small rise, looking down at the cluster of houses nestled in the valley below. A column of thick, black smoke could be seen at one end of the village, and as it grew the wind blew it towards the small band of adventurers. The smell was sickeningly familiar by now: burning human flesh. They had seen the same thing at the last three villages they'd come across -- where the sickness passed there were too many dead to bury.

The sound of a brutally violent cough shook Lara from her memories. She glanced back at the terribly weakened man in the make-shift travois, his coughing fit fading. He'd been a powerful warrior just days ago, riding tall and proud, but where the sickness passed . . . Even if a priest could be found with the power to cleanse someone of the disease, he'd never be able to save the hordes of deathly ill people Lara had seen over the last few days.

There had to be some other way to stop the sickness. There had to be.

In most fantasy games, disease is often seen as little more than one more way for a creature to cause damage and one more thing to be magically healed. Throughout history, however, real-world infectious diseases have decimated civilizations, turned the tide of wars, and killed millions upon millions of people. Used properly, these completely mundane illnesses can add large-scale danger and suspense to any adventure. The following is a variant disease model for **d20**. A list of several diseases, each fit to this model, has also been provided.

At the core of any infectious disease is its agent. Just as with PCs, the characteristics of the agent determine how effective it is. These characteristics include the agent's infectivity, pathogenicity, and virulence. Infectivity refers to the ability of an agent to enter and multiply in a susceptible host, thereby producing infection or disease. The higher the infectivity, the more likely someone who is exposed to the disease will actually become infected. Pathogenicity refers to the ability of the agent to cause symptoms in the infected host. The higher the pathogenicity, the more likely someone who is infected will develop symptoms of the disease. Virulence refers to the severity of the disease the agent produces. The more virulent an agent is, the more life-threatening the disease it produces. These three aspects are reflected by the Infectivity, Pathogenicity, and Virulence Difficulty Classes (DCs) for each disease.

At the end of a day during which an adventurer is exposed to a disease agent she must make a Fortitude saving throw against the agent's Infectivity DC. The Infectivity DC is equal to the Base Infectivity DC from Table 1: Disease Characteristics plus an exposure modifier, if one applies. If a disease has an exposure modifier it will be listed in the write-up of the disease. Only apply the least advantageous exposure modifier to the roll, and only make one Fortitude saving throw against Infectivity per disease per day. A successful Fortitude save means that the adventurer did not actually become infected with the disease, despite her exposure.

If a character is infected, another Fortitude saving throw is made, this time against the agent's Pathogenicity DC. Success means the character, though infected, will not become sick. If the character fails this saving throw, the incubation period, length of disease, and period of communicability are rolled. As soon as the incubation period has passed, the sick individual begins making Fortitude saving throws against the agent's Virulence DC once per day she has the disease (as determined by the length of disease roll). A critical success -- natural 20 -- acts as a successful save for the day rolled and for the next day as well. A successful save means the person takes either no damage or, if the disease is invariably fatal without magical intervention, half damage. A failed roll means she takes the damage listed. A critical failure -- natural 1 -- means she takes double the damage for the day. All attribute damage, regardless of the

roll, is temporary. If someone uses the Heal skill, their skill check can be used in place of the saving throw against the Virulence DC for the day. If the DM so chooses, a successful Heal skill attempt can also be used to diagnose these diseases.

If someone survives through the length of the disease she will begin to recover . . . in most cases. It should be noted that, barring magical intervention, three of the diseases listed below are always fatal: pneumonic plague, rabies, and *Naegleria fowleri*. For these three, anyone who survives through the last day of the disease will die at the end of that day.

It should be obvious by this point that a DM must use caution when introducing one of these diseases into a campaign. PCs should have a respectable chance of surviving, be it through the use of intelligent precautions, mundane healing, or magical cleansing. Although quite an adventure could come of the party's attempts to find a cure for one of their stricken fellows, it may be more interesting to put them up against a disease they can likely survive but that ravages an entire countryside, or even an entire country. Priests will be unable to heal everyone, and in theory those who have been magically cured are still at risk for falling ill again.

As a further note on the subject of magical healing, even if a disease normally leaves survivors with some form of immunity, a magically cured person's immune system may never have the chance to create that immunity. It would be the DM's call as to if the infected individual had been sick long enough to develop immunity. On the other hand, a magically cured person will immediately cease being a carrier for the disease.

The ten diseases described below are directed largely at humans, but feel free to inflict them on any race. The information provided has been simplified somewhat, so it is neither exact nor complete. If you want more specifics, check out the following:

- [The Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](http://www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm) website offers excellent information on most diseases. Try www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm for starters, or go directly to their main page at www.cdc.gov and run a search for the disease you are interested in.
- *The Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance*, by Laurie Garrett. This book has loads of great material on multiple infectious diseases. It's full of stories and details that could really spice up DM descriptions.
- *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual* -- The American Public Health Association puts this book out every few years. It is an amazing resource for anyone wanting information on just about any communicable disease, but the terminology can get a bit thick at times.

The Disease Template

- **Transmission:** This is the means by which the disease is transmitted.
- **Reservoirs:** This is where the disease agent normally lives.
- **Incubation period:** This is the amount of time between infection and the onset of the disease symptoms.
- **Symptoms:** These are the changes seen in a person that indicate she has a disease.
- **Length of disease:** This is how long the character will be sick.
- **Period of communicability:** This is the time slot during which the infected character can pass her disease on to others.
- **Prevention:** These are means by which characters can attempt to avoid contracting the disease.
- **Immunity:** This is information on whether or not an individual who survives the disease will then be immune to the disease.
- **Exposure modifiers:** These are the modifiers that can be applied to the Base Infectivity DC, depending on how the character was exposed to the disease.

Cholera

Historically, cholera was confined to India until the early 19th century, at which point it spread throughout Asia.

During the 20th century it was dispersed across the majority of the globe. It is caused by the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. Once an individual has been infected, the bacteria generate toxin that results in severe diarrhea. This sudden loss of fluids and electrolytes can often be fatal.

- **Transmission:** Ingestion of food or water that is contaminated with the feces or vomit of an infected individual can lead to infection.
- **Reservoirs:** Humans. Evidence also suggests that plankton can occasionally serve as reservoirs.
- **Incubation period:** 1d4 days.
- **Symptoms:** Sudden and profuse watery diarrhea, from 12 to 20 liters (about 3 to 5 gallons) a day. This will cause severe dehydration and can lead to shock, collapse, and often death. Violent vomiting may also occur.
 - Any attempts to use the Heal skill to treat cholera must include rehydration!
 - In order to stop the diarrhea, remove disease would need to be followed up by neutralize poison.
- **Length of disease:** 1d4 days.
- **Period of communicability:** During the course of disease and for 1d4 additional days after recovery.
- **Prevention:** Wash hands, boil water, and dispose of human feces in a sanitary manner.
- **Immunity:** Infection provides some immunity against future infection by a similar strain. It is possible for someone who has survived a previous infection to contract cholera a second time from a different strain. (The Base Infectivity DC drops to 10 for individuals exposed to a strain they have been infected with before.)
- **Exposure modifiers:** None.

Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever

Ebola is a very severe, and often fatal, viral disease seen in humans and monkeys. The agent is called the Ebola virus. Some aspects of the disease, such as its natural reservoir, have yet to be figured out. What is known is that when the disease strikes, it does so incredibly quickly. It transmitted very easily from person to person, but it can sometimes kill an infected individual so swiftly that they don't have a chance to pass the disease on. Since this limits the survival of the virus, it is felt that Ebola has not had a chance to evolve such that it makes better use of human hosts. This means that humans are currently accidental hosts for the disease rather than normal pieces of the virus' life cycle.

- **Transmission:** Direct contact with the blood or secretions of an infected human will transfer the virus. It is likely that the same transmission mechanism takes place between some animal and humans as well.
- **Reservoirs:** Unknown. There is likely a jungle animal that acts as a reservoir for the virus, but it has not yet been identified. Possible culprits include bats, rodents, and insects.
- **Incubation period:** 2d10 days.
- **Symptoms:** Sudden onset of high fever, tenderness or pain of the muscles, headache, stomach pain, fatigue, and diarrhea followed by sore throat, rash, red and itchy eyes, vomiting blood, and bloody diarrhea. Later symptoms can include bleeding, chest pain, blindness, and shock.
- **Length of disease:** 1d6 days.
- **Period of communicability:** Risk of transmission is highest during the late stages of illness when the patient is vomiting, having diarrhea, or hemorrhaging. Risk during the incubation period is low. Virus can be present for weeks (7) after recovery in some secretions.
- **Prevention:** Avoid contact with the blood or secretions of an infected person.
- **Immunity:** Surviving Ebola may provide some immunity against future infection. (The Base Infectivity DC drops to 10 for individuals who have survived Ebola in the past.)
- **Exposure modifiers:**
 - Use the Base Infectivity DC if the PC comes in contact with the blood or secretions of an infected individual who is either still in the incubation period for the disease or who has just begun to show symptoms of the disease.
 - Add 10 if the PC comes in contact with the blood or secretions of an infected person in the late stages of the disease.

Influenza

The specific virus responsible for many influenza epidemics, and all of the pandemics, is the influenza A virus. Several influenza pandemics have occurred over the course of history, thrice in the last 100 years. Two hundred million people were infected, and 20 million died, during the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918. Subsequent pandemics in 1957 and 1968 were responsible for over 1.5 million deaths worldwide.

- **Transmission:** Airborne viral particles are inhaled or are picked up off of contaminated surfaces and are placed in the nose or mouth. These particles come from infected humans and pigs. Infected birds can infect pigs, but they can't infect humans.
- **Reservoirs:** Humans, pigs, and birds.
- **Incubation period:** 1d3 days.
- **Symptoms:** Fever, headache, prostration, profuse bloody nose, sore throat, and cough. The cough is often severe and protracted, but other manifestations are usually self-limited.
- **Length of disease:** 1d6+1 days.
- **Period of communicability:** 1d4+1 days from onset of symptoms.
- **Prevention:** Wash hands, avoid those who are infected.
- **Immunity:** The virus mutates constantly, so previous infection does not provide immunity.
- **Exposure modifiers:**
 - Use the Base Infectivity DC if the PC is exposed to an infected human or pig.
 - Add 5 if the PC is exposed to an infected human or pig in a closed or crowded area.

Malaria

Current estimates are that malaria affects some 300 million people worldwide each year and causes from 2 to 4 million deaths. There are four different protozoans that can cause malaria, but this model focuses on the deadliest of the four: Plasmodium falciparum. Transmitted by mosquitoes, malaria has plagued mankind for centuries. It is said that the Countess d'El Chinchon, wife of the Viceroy of Peru, fell ill with malaria in 1638 but was cured by the bark of certain trees. These trees, later called cinchona, are the source of quinine, an antimalarial drug still occasionally used today.

Interestingly, the less deadly varieties of malaria were eventually used to cure syphilis in the days before antibiotics. The high fevers of malaria would kill the bacteria causing the syphilis, and then quinine would be used to cure the malaria.

- **Transmission:** A mosquito is infected after feeding from a person with malaria. When that mosquito later bites someone else it can infect them with the protozoan.
- **Reservoirs:** Humans.
- **Incubation period:** 1d6+6 days.
- **Symptoms:** High fever, chills, sweats, cough, diarrhea, respiratory distress, and headache may be seen first, and can be followed by jaundice, blood clotting problems, shock, kidney and liver failure, fluid in the lungs and cerebrum, convulsions, coma, and death. Disorientation and delirium may also be seen. The fever may be daily, constant, or irregular.
 - Add a +5 circumstance bonus to any Heal rolls that incorporate the use of quinine. One week of successful Healing checks (one per day) using quinine will end the disease.
 - Individuals who have the sickle cell trait save against a Virulence DC of 10. (The sickle cell trait refers to a human genetic trait that makes it difficult for P. falciparum to invade red blood cells, thereby lessening the severity of the disease. The sickle cell trait can also lead to sickle cell anemia, however, which is a deadly disease in its own right.)
- **Length of disease:** 1d6+2 weeks.
- **Period of communicability:** An infected mosquito remains infective for life.
- **Prevention:** The most useful prevention measure is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes.
- **Immunity:** Individuals who have survived a bout of malaria are immune for 3 months.
- **Exposure modifiers:** None.

Naegleria fowleri

N. fowleri is an amoeba that lives in the warm, still water of ponds, lakes, or backwater bays. If an individual gets water containing the amoeba up their nose, they risk being infected. After entry into the nose, the amoeba burrows along the olfactory nerve to the brain, where it multiplies.

- **Transmission:** Someone can only be infected if they get contaminated water up their nose.
- **Reservoirs:** Water.
- **Incubation period:** 1d4 days.
- **Symptoms:** Severe frontal headache, fever, and blocked nose. May be followed by altered taste and smell, stiff neck, and pain in the hamstring muscles.
- **Length of disease:** 4 days. Deadly without magical intervention.
- **Period of communicability:** None.
- **Prevention:** Avoid getting warm, stagnant water up your nose.
- **Immunity:** None
- **Exposure modifiers:** None

Plague, Bubonic

The bubonic plague is one-half of the infamous Black Plague that killed approximately a quarter of the entire population of Europe during the 14th century. The second half, pneumonic plague, is described next. Both diseases are caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, which is carried around by infected rodent fleas that inject the bacteria into creatures they bite. The fleas are generally associated with rats, but they will happily feed off of any mammals, including humans. As with many diseases, epidemics of bubonic plague often begin in villages or cities with poor sanitation. The presence of piles of garbage attracts the rats, as well as the stray cats and dogs, that act as both breeding grounds for the fleas and reservoirs for the disease.

- **Transmission:** Humans can be infected by flea bites, by the bites or scratches of infected cats, or by coming into direct contact with the tissues of infected animals.
- **Reservoirs:** Wild rodents, rabbits, cats and other carnivores.
- **Incubation period:** 1d6 days.
- **Symptoms:** High fever, chills, restlessness, tenderness or pain in the muscles, nausea, headache, sore throat, swollen lymph nodes (called "buboes"), staggering gait, mental confusion, delirium, shock, and coma.
- **Length of disease:** 1d6 days.
- **Period of communicability:** Infected fleas can continue to spread the disease for months.
- **Prevention:** Avoid fleas, infective tissues, and infected animals. At the community level, good sanitation practices will reduce the risk of an epidemic.
- **Immunity:** Surviving bubonic plague provides relative immunity against future infection. (The Base Infectivity DC drops to 5 for individuals who have survived bubonic plague in the past.)
- **Exposure modifiers:**
 - Use the Base Infectivity DC if the PC is exposed to fresh corpses (<1 day old) of those killed by plague.
 - Add 5 if the PC is exposed to the tissues of an infected creature or is bitten or scratched by an infected cat.
 - Add 10 if the PC is exposed to infected fleas.

Plague, Pneumonic

Bubonic plague can progress into pneumonic plague, which can then be spread by air-borne droplets. It is deadlier and more contagious than bubonic plague.

- **Transmission:** Airborne bacteria are spread by infected humans and cats. Inhalation of them can lead to infection.
- **Reservoirs:** Humans and cats.
- **Incubation period:** 1d3 days.
- **Symptoms:** Sudden onset of shaking chill, fever, chest pain, labored and/or fast breathing, and a cough that

produces bloody phlegm.

- **Length of disease:** 1d3 days. Deadly without magical intervention.
- **Period of communicability:** During the course of the symptoms.
- **Prevention:** Avoid exposure to infected animals, particularly cats, and humans.
- **Immunity:** Recovery from pneumonic plague provides immunity against future infection.
- **Exposure modifiers:**
 - Use the Base Infectivity DC if the PC is infected by bubonic plague. This roll is only made once during the course of a bubonic plague infection -- the first day the PC fails a Fortitude save against the bubonic plague Virulence DC. If a PC contracts pneumonic plague by this route, begin using the pneumonic plague Virulence DC and damage, instead of those for bubonic plague, as of the next day. The Length of Disease should be rolled for the pneumonic plague and starts when the PC begins attempting to save against the pneumonic plague Virulence DC.
 - Add 5 if the PC is exposed to infected humans or cats.
 - Add 10 if the PC is exposed to an infected human in a closed or crowded area.

Rabies

Rabies is caused by rabies virus and results in fatal inflammation of the brain. Infected individuals often appear to foam at the mouth. This is because of an increased amount of saliva combined with a difficulty swallowing. Trying to swallow can cause muscle spasms, which has led some people to associate rabies with hydrophobia -- the fear of water.

- **Transmission:** Animal bites transfer the virus, which is found in the animal's saliva. On very rare occasions airborne virus has caused disease. This has generally only taken place in caverns where many bats were roosting.
- **Reservoirs:** Bats, skunks, dogs, foxes, coyotes, raccoons, and cats are all well known reservoirs of rabies.
- **Incubation period:** 1d6+2 weeks.
- **Symptoms:** At first there may be a fever and/or headache that lasts for days, and the site of the bite may tingle or feel numb. Within days the infected individual will show anxiety, confusion, and agitation, progressing to delirium, abnormal behavior, hallucinations, and insomnia. In animals there are two types of rabies symptoms seen. "Furious rabies," typically the kind exhibited by dogs, makes the animal restless and highly excitable, such that they attack anything within reach. The animal will also begin foaming at the mouth. "Dumb rabies" refers to cases where the animal becomes relatively quiet, ignoring its surroundings. It may suddenly lash out, however, if provoked. This form of rabies is particularly common in cats.
- **Length of disease:** 1d8+2 days for humans. 1d6+1 days for animals. Deadly without magical intervention.
- **Period of communicability:** 1d6+1 days before symptoms are seen, as well as while symptoms are evident.
- **Prevention:** Avoid contact with strange animals, particularly those which are acting oddly.
- **Immunity:** None.
- **Exposure modifiers:**
 - Use the Base Infectivity DC if the PC is bitten by a rabid creature.
 - Subtract 5 if the PC is in a cave inhabited by rabid bats.

Smallpox (Variola)

Smallpox has been the source of a great deal of suffering throughout history. Epidemics periodically made their way through Europe, killing thousands of people. During the Middle Ages, an estimated 80% of the population of Europe became infected with smallpox at some point during their lives. In the New World, smallpox decimated the American Indian population on the East Coast when European settlers brought the infection over.

This disease is caused by a virus called the smallpox (variola) virus and is identifiable by the rash it causes. This rash results in scabbing that leaves deep pits and scars on the skin, making survivors easy to spot.

Note: The DM may wish it to be common Heal knowledge that a vaccine can be made from cowpox that will provide immunity against smallpox.

- **Transmission:** Airborne viral particles, spread by infected humans, can cause infection if inhaled. Infection can also be the result of direct contact with a sick individual or with something they have recently touched.
- **Reservoirs:** Humans.
- **Incubation period:** 1d4+10 days to illness, 1d3+1 more days to onset of rash.
- **Symptoms:** Fever, headache, and severe backache, and occasionally abdominal pain and vomiting. The fever drops when the rash begins. The rash is first seen on the face, arms, and legs, and later spreads to the trunk. The red bumps of the rash become blister-like lesions filled with infectious virus. After about a week, these lesions will break open and then scab over.
- **Length of disease:** 1d3+1 days to onset of rash, 3 weeks from onset of rash until all scabs are gone. *Note:* An infected individual stops making checks against the Virulence DC 3 days after the onset of the rash. If she has survived the disease, she begins to recover. The rash and scabbing will run its course even though the individual now feels better.
- **Period of communicability:** An infected individual is most contagious in the days after the illness has begun but before the rash. During this time droplets of the virus are being spread through the air and can be breathed in by others. An infected individual can also infect others by touch after the skin lesions have developed up until the time all the scabs are gone. It is also possible for an infected person to contaminate an object by touching it. Anyone touching such object in the hour after it has been contaminated risks infection.
- **Prevention:** Quarantine those who have the illness, as well as anyone they have been in contact with.
- **Immunity:** Individuals who have previously had either smallpox or cowpox, a mild illness contracted from cows, are immune to further infection by smallpox.
- **Exposure modifiers:**
 - Use the Base Infectivity DC if the PC experiences direct contact with either an individual with lesions or a contaminated surface.
 - Add 5 if the PC is exposed to air-borne droplets contaminated with the virus.

Typhoid Fever

Typhoid fever is caused by the bacterium *Salmonella typhi*. Some people infected by the organism show hardly any symptoms, but people who have been infected by the disease, regardless of whether or not they showed any symptoms, can become carriers who shed the bacteria into the environment. This shedding can continue for months or years.

- **Transmission:** The bacteria are picked up by ingesting food or water that has been contaminated by the feces of an infected human.
- **Reservoirs:** Humans.
- **Incubation period:** 1d4 weeks
- **Symptoms:** High fever, a flushed appearance, nosebleeds, cough, and anorexia will be seen. There is a 25% chance of rose spots appearing on the trunk. Chills, convulsions, and delirium may also occur.
- **Length of disease:** 1d2+1 weeks.
- **Period of communicability:** 1d12 + 2 months following infection -- even characters who succeed their Fortitude save against the Pathogenicity DC for typhoid fever will be able to pass the disease on. If a natural 1 is rolled against the Infectivity DC, the individual becomes a permanent carrier of the disease.
- **Prevention:** Wash hands, boil water, control flies, and dispose of human feces in a sanitary manner.
- **Immunity:** Someone who has been infected by *S. typhi*, even if she never had symptoms, develops immunity against future infection by this organism.
- **Exposure modifiers:** None.

Table 1: Disease Characteristics

Disease	BIDC ¹	PDC	Incubation Period	Length of Disease	VDC	Damage
Cholera	18	10	1d4 days	1d4 days	15	4 Con, 4 Str

Ebola	15	20	1d10 days	1d6 days	20	6 Con, 4 Str
Influenza	15	15	1d3 days	1d6+1 days	10 ²	3 Con, 3 Str
Rabies	10	*	1d6+2 weeks	1d8+2 days/1d6+1 days**	20 ³	4 Int, 4 Wis
Malaria	10	15	1d6+6 days	1d6+2 weeks	18\$	4 Int, 2 Con
N. fowleri	10	*	1d4 days	4 days	20 ³	4 Con, 2 Int
Plague						
Bubonic	10	18	1d6 days	1d6 days	15	3 Con, 2 Str, 2 Int, 2 Dex
Pneumonic	15	18	1d3 days	1d3 days	20 ³	6 Con, 2 Str, 2 Int, 2 Dex
Smallpox	15	*	1d4+10 days	1d3+4 days**	15	3 Con, 2 Str, 2 Dex
Typhoid Fever	12	15	1d4 weeks	1d2+1 weeks	10	2 Con, 2 Str

Abbreviations

BIDC Base Infectivity DC

PDC Pathogenicity DC

VDC Virulence DC

¹ The Base Infectivity DC may need to be modified by an exposure modifier.

² For a new pandemic strain of influenza, use a Virulence DC of 20.

³ This disease is fatal without magical intervention.

* Infection always results in symptoms.

** See write-up of disease for details.

Yours Truly, Prester John

"What understanding, if it be not altogether barren or barbarous, can delight itself, reading how a great tower full of knights doth pass through the sea as fast as a ship with the most prosperous wind? and that going to bed a man is in Lombardy, and the next morning finds himself in Prester John's country, among the Indians, or in some other region which never was discovered by Ptolemy, nor seen by Marco Polo?"

-- Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*

Somewhere, on the borders of fantasy and fraud, is the kingdom of Prester John. In its way, it serves as the gateway to the very Commonwealth of Fiction, since by some measures Prester John may be the first intentionally fictional character in Western literature. In another way, it holds the rear-guard of the Republic of History, as Prester John may be the last footprint of the real world on the road of dreams and desires that leads deep into Fantasy. Either way, or bisociatively both, Prester John lives and reigns over India Ultraterrestria, the half-image on the map just east of "Here Be Dragons." Fortunately, adrift on the foam of the centuries, he still finds time to write.

"If indeed you wish to know wherein consists our great power, then believe without doubting that I, Prester John, who reign supreme, exceed in riches, virtue, and power all creatures who dwell under heaven. Seventy-two kings pay tribute to me. I am a devout Christian and everywhere protect the Christians of our empire, nourishing them with alms. . . . Our magnificence dominates the Three Indias, and extends to Farther India, where the body of St. Thomas the Apostle rests. It reaches through the desert toward the place of the rising of the Sun, and continues through the valley of deserted Babylon close by the Tower of Babel. . . . If you can count the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea, you will be able to judge thereby the vastness of our realm and our power.

-- Letter of Prester John to the Emperor of Byzantium (ca. 1165)

Around 1165, a copy (soon followed by hundreds more) of the Letter of Prester John to the Emperor of Byzantium began circulating through the cities and courts of Western Europe. One of three allegedly sent (the other two to the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor) by a powerful Christian ruler somewhere to the East, it contained a boastful claim to power over seventy-two kings, a lurid description of a land of preternatural wealth, and a promise of aid against the Saracens -- if the Western rulers could prove themselves worthy. To the intriguing descriptions of a sea of sand and a river of stones, conventional invocations of the Earthly Paradise and the Ten Tribes of Israel, and Biblical depictions of a palace of gems, later writers added fiery salamanders, fierce [griffins](#), [rocs](#) (called Yllerions here), troops of [Amazons](#), and the rest of the delightful medieval mental salad bar. Even after Westerners began crossing Asia for themselves, Prester John remained on the radar; our old pal [Sir John Mandeville](#) served with Prester John's armies, a century after Marco Polo visited the site of his final defeat at the hands of the Mongols. Mandeville's editor Jean d'Outremeuse made Prester John the son of Charlemagne's paladin Ogier le Dane; the pious Johannes of Hildesheim made him the successor of the [Three Magi](#). Prester John was apparently, in good medieval practice, forming marital alliances with the other great figures of legend.

"He said, indeed, that not many years since, one John, a king and priest living in the Far East, beyond Persia and Armenia, and who, with his people, is a Christian, but a Nestorian, had warred upon the so-called Samiards, the brother kings of the Medes and Persians. . . . He is said to be a descendant of the Magi of old, who are mentioned in the Gospel. He governs the same people as they did and is said to enjoy such glory and such plenty that he uses no scepter save one of emerald. Fired by the example of his forefathers, who came to adore Christ in the manger, he proposed to go to Jerusalem, but he was, they say, turned back for the aforementioned reason."

-- Otto of Friesing, *Historia de Duabus Civitatibus* (1146)

The likeliest explanation of the Letter itself is a pious fraud, intended as propaganda for a renewed Crusade following the disaster of the Second Crusade in 1149. Ironically, this Crusade had been sparked in no small part by one Bishop Hugh of Jabala, who met with Pope Eugenius III and told him of a powerful Christian king named Prester John, who had destroyed the Saracen kings of Persia in battle a few years previously and waited for allies to march again. Bishop Hugh's story is actually the tale of Yeh-lu Ta-shih, the (Buddhist) Khan of Kara-Khitai, who did in fact massively defeat the Persian Seljuks under Sanjar near Samarkand in 1141, distorted by distance or by Hugh's desire to inspire a

Crusade. Other feeders of that stream include the Georgian general John Orbelian, who defeated the Persians in a series of battles two decades earlier; the Indian adventurer who identified himself as "Patriarch John of India" on a mission to Pope Calixtus II in 1122; and possibly even the hereditary Mar Shimon, Patriarch of the Assyrian Nestorian Christians in upper Mesopotamia. The conquests of Genghis Khan, who really did splinter the Saracen rulers of the East in battle, led to a brief resurgence of the legend in 1221, for some reason this time identifying Genghis as Prester John's grandson David. Later writers, however, recast the story yet again, with a bewildering variety of Prester Johns allied with, related to, opposing, killed by, or identified with various Mongol khans and chieftains. His dream-kingdom at risk with the waning of the Crusading fever, Prester John had apparently taken to guerilla warfare, slipping in and out of chronicles and letters to resupply his griffin-mounted troops.

"But all the regions round about watch for the time of the dragons, and when they see one that has fallen, they wait for seventy days, and then go down and find the bare bones of the dragon, and take the carbuncle which is rooted in the top of his head, and carry it to the emperor of the Ethiopians, whom you call Prester John."

-- Jordanus of Severac, *Mirabilia Descripta* (ca. 1335)

Which may be why, when the Pope wanted to write back to Prester John, he sent his messenger to Africa instead. In 1177, Pope Alexander III did, in fact, send a doctor named Philip as ambassador to a well-known Christian kingdom surrounded by Saracens, on a long river, infested by dragons, full of black warriors -- Ethiopia. Medieval geography being the plastic thing it was, identifying Ethiopia as the Third India was a veritable snap; the fact of a Christian king of kings ruling the country sealed the deal. Italian traders and Ethiopian emissaries seem to have carried on quite the traffic throughout the 14th century. The Portuguese fixated on this African Prester John, sending ship after ship around Africa in search of his kingdom, and agents deep up the Nile River. When the the Portuguese finally found Ethiopia they engaged in a series of expeditions into the interior that resulted in a military alliance in 1541 and preserved Ethiopian independence and Ethiopian Christianity -- ironically, the Crusaders had saved Prester John, rather than the other way around.

Then for the first time, Repanse de Schoye was able to be glad of her journey. Later, in India, she gave birth to a son, whose name was John. People called him Prester John, and ever since, people have given that name to the kings there.

-- Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* (ca. 1205)

Why did the Portuguese so eagerly seek Prester John? It was the goal of Prince Henry the Navigator "to have knowledge of the land of Prester John," and Prince Henry was the head of the Portuguese Knights of Christ, which is to say, the Templars. In Wolfram's *Parzival*, Prester John is the son of Feirefiz, Parzival's half-brother, and the Grail-bearer Repanse de Schoye. Hence, the Grail Kingdom becomes the Kingdom of Prester John, and the Grail Mountain of Munsalvaesche, guarded by Templars, rises somehow in "India" (or, as Wolfram calls it, Tribalibot). In *The Sign and the Seal*, Graham Hancock insists, among other things, that a company of Templars went to Ethiopia (ruled by the descendants of King Solomon, in a kindred Holy Bloodline) in 1185 to seek out the Ark of the Covenant -- and they might have brought with them the Holy Grail their order protected. Coming at it a different way, Prester John had in his lands a "hollow stone" that healed all injuries, the Fountain of Youth, and his emblem was a mighty [emerald](#) scepter -- which, along with the fallen "carbuncles" from heaven, should set alight any number of Grail-shaped beacons in the wary reader.

"Then a song began, a wild incantation in which all joined. The old priest would speak some words, and the reply came in barbaric music. The words meant nothing to me; they must have been in some tongue long since dead. But the music told its own tale. It spoke of old kings and great battles, of splendid palaces and strong battlements, of queens white as ivory, of death and life, love and hate, joy and sorrow. It spoke, too, of desperate things, mysteries of horror long shut to the world. No Kaffir ever forged that ritual. It must have come straight from Prester John or Sheba's queen, or whoever ruled in Africa when time was young."

-- John Buchan, *Prester John* (1910)

With all that, perhaps it's no wonder that Prester John became gifted with, among other things, immortality. At the very least, this explains how he can be a contemporary of the Three Magi, Parzival, Charlemagne, and Sir John Mandeville. The notion that Prester John was the Apostle John, who (the Gospel of Mark hints) was told to "remain until I come

again" by Jesus, is one possibility. Another is that Prester John was the [Wandering Jew](#), whose press-agents were also busy in medieval Europe. In *Yesterday We Saw Mermaids*, Esther Friesner posits gleefully that Prester John was one of the Magi who betrayed Christ's location to Herod, and was sentenced to rule an American fairyland of gods and monsters eternally. In *War in Heaven*, Charles Williams casts him as an immortal do-gooder akin to [Saint-Germain](#). Perhaps the identification of Prester John's country with Tibet (on the Waldseemuller map of 1507) hints that Prester John, like the Dalai Lama, is reincarnated down through the centuries, guarding the gates to his fantastic kingdom and readying his monstrous armies for a new Crusade. Possibly, blackened and twisted by historical pressure, he rules the fictive Dark Land behind the [Congo](#), or in happier fettle has decamped to another new continent to build his Emerald City on the slopes of the [Big Rock Candy Mountain](#). Why not gamble a stamp and find out?

Inquisitio Ytarria

The Congregation of the Holy Inquisition of Yrth

by Jeremy Davies

"Kill them all. God will recognize his own."

--Arnald-Amalric, Papal legate, Beziers, Earth, 1208

History

In the year 1240, out of the shadows of the Banestorm, a Dominican monk by the name of Robert Lebougre appeared in Megalos. He quickly became involved in the political intrigues of the growing Empire, and attached himself to the Holy Order of St. Michael Olybrius of Serrun. The Olybrians were only 40 years old and resembled the Dominicans from Earth quite closely. His natural leadership and charisma soon gained him power within the order, allowing him to introduce a radical religious movement that he had been a part of on Earth. Witnessing pagan practices in the north of Megalos first hand, Robert petitioned the northern bishops for an Inquisition into the state of the Faith in Yrth. The bishops responded in the winter of 1242 by making Robert Lebougre the head of a new ecclesiastical Gestapo, the Office of the Inquisition.

Robert became active in the Northern counties where the barbarians dubbed him Robert the Black (either due to his temperament or robe) and pursued the eradication of neo-pagan belief in areas now known as Quarterdec, Kethalos, Hidelban, and Myrgan, where many peoples shared culture with the nomads, and pagans were still openly active up until the border wars of 1270-99. He was also preoccupied with the subjugating of Dwarves residing in the Whitehoods. Robert claimed to have had a vision from Saint Olybrius himself informing him that the Dwarves were evil and the spawn of demons.

He would often petition the Emperor for serious military aid to "crusade" into the far north, bringing the Inquisition right to the heathen and the "unholy little ones." But the fledgling Empire had problems elsewhere, though Menelaus was always eager to hear from Robert and his progress. Eventually, in the Spring of 1256, Robert the Black was killed by a group of northern raiders at a village known as Rogald, about 50 miles north of Hidelban. Accounts vary, but the most accurate seem to say that the raiders were mostly made up of dwarves.

In his 16 years on Yrth, records show that he was directly responsible for the deaths of 676 men, women, and children of heretical beliefs, and at least 52 dwarves. He saw his Office increase from an initial compliment of 12 clerics and 50 men-at-arms to 180 clergy men and 500 warriors. The site Robert died upon was used to construct a large Olybrian Abbey in 1545, called Lebougre Abbey of Rogald. It became the headquarters of the Congregation of the Holy Inquisition of Yrth, and stands strong and firm to this day.

After Robert's untimely death, the Office of the Inquisition declined. There was some involvement in the border wars with the barbarians -- Robert's dream of heavy military support coming over 20 years too late -- but little of import. The factionalized bishops of the time did not actually elevate anyone to lead the Office, so its power crumbled just as its wishes were fulfilled. By 1304, the Office of the Inquisition was formally recanted by a simple stroke of the quill, though the activities of the Olybrian friars kept the spirit alive.

Without a concerted unit policing Church principles, areas around Christendom began to fall in their religious obligations. Tithes became less frequent in this period of turning away from the Church (1305-1403), known in history as "the way-turning." Bishop Rynnus of Craine, a prominent Church historian of the time, wrote in 1405:

"Heresy began to form amongst the flock as if that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world, who the Archangel Michael had cast out by his own Holy hand, had come to teach amongst us and bring good

Christ-fearing men down to the pits of fire from whence he crawled."

The Curia was formed in 1403, so Catholicism gained a somewhat united front. To combat the rampant heresy -- and fund drainage -- a new group known as the Order of the Archangel Michael was formed in 1412 (p. F20). The Michaelites were an unclostered order which soon began to make a name for themselves as a militant and ferocious group of wandering murderers and looters. There was little supervision of the order by the Curia, who were happy to see the tithes come rolling back in, and their lands and holdings secured. The protests against the order began to mount however, particularly from the "grass roots" level of clergy.

After Domitus completed his Code in 1578, it became apparent to the Curia that a more organized and respectable form of religious policing was required which would require monks, not barely controllable thugs, as its enforcers. The Curia was anxious to enforce their new complete and unequivocal Canon law. Add to this a resurgence in the Banestorm -- bringing large amounts of Protestant heretics to Yrth, an isolated spread of Islam in the southwest, and the appearance of Jesuits in the southeast -- and the Curia looked to the past for guidance.

In the Summer of 1580, a new entity called the Congregation of the Holy Inquisition of Yrth was formed, using Lebourge's Office of the Inquisition as a guideline. The Order of the Archangel Michael slowly become more used in secular investigative matters, though a close Christian tie remains to this day in the Megalan Order.

Father Haralf of Hidelban, the Grand Master of the Olybrian Order, was named the Grand Inquisitor. He was given serious backing by the Church in the form of the most feared military institution on the face of the planet: the Knights Templar. In addition to this, Emperor Claddius 1 "the Righteous" (1598-1614) -- a devout and fervent church man on the throne -- mobilized and put at Haralf's disposal several Imperial Legions.

Haralf suddenly became one of the most powerful humans in Yrthian history. Lebourge's dream of the north was not forgotten, and there was vengeance for the founder's blood. A vain and impatient man, inexperienced in the ways of war, Haralf attempted to achieve everything at once. He refused military advice, claiming that God was directing his will. Splitting his resources, he sent forces south and southeast in 1580, and north to the Whitehood mountains in 1585.

The northern campaign ended in quick disaster. Even the might of two Imperial Legions and a heavy compliment of Templars is not enough to tax the roused anger of the dwarves of Thulin in their ancient homeland. It remains the worst military failure of the Empire to this day; as far as the Knights Templar are concerned, it is unwise to even mention the year 1585 in their vicinity . . .

In the South, the campaign stagnated. The tribunal set up in Cardiel in 1581 to chase Protestants received little help from the locals. Most of the heretics avoided the inquisitors by crossing into North Tredroy and receiving the protection of the Muslims. There was sporadic and isolated fighting in the streets between Templars and Muslims when the monks attempt to torture some of their prisoners. The Tredroyan Mages and Mercenaries Guilds helped defeat and repel the Inquisitors.

In the winter of 1613, Simon de Anjou -- a Jesuit that came before the Inquisition refusing to recant his heresies -- was put to death personally by Haralf, in spite of direct orders from the Curia to the contrary. Haralf now believed that God has turned away from the Curia and was looking to him to become the supreme Patriarch of Yrth, an Yrthly Pope. Just as the Bishops in Megalos feared, Simon, a well-known and popular priest of the people, instantly became a martyr. The people of Araterre revolt against the church almost to a person, causing the Curia to back down and eventually accept the Society of Jesus. Haralf is blamed for the affair and is tried and convicted of "dealing with demons."

The cleansing fire of the Inquisition that he used so frequently as Inquisitor, gave him his final embrace. It was a Michaelite who brought Simon de Anjou's heretical teachings to the attention of the Congregation in 1612. Although the Order was no longer involved in most canonical Church investigations, many constables acted as agents to the Congregation, some taking on permanent roles as non-decision-making pre-investigators that began to be referred to as Brokers.

Haralf's legacy remains in the form of the Twelfth Decree, also known as the Haralfian Decree. The original Canon

law drawn up by Domitus did not allow for the Church to rule on "judgments of blood," making Excommunication and maiming the worst sentence available to an ecclesiastical court. The Inquisition was given permission in 1583 to make judgments of blood in the pursuit of:

" . . . the cleansing and ultimate purging of souls for the heretic."
-- 12th Decree, Part 4; Clause 8

After the embarrassing failures, the Congregation of the Holy Inquisition declined in international power, but remained an internal force within the borders of Megalos. Run almost exclusively by the Olybrian order, monks of the Inquisition began to don red mantles in 1626 to differentiate themselves from those involved in normal duties. After the debacle in Araterre, the Curia was loathe to grant too much actual decision making power to the Inquisition.

The Inquisition became more active in Cardiel in the 18th century, trying to enforce Canon law on the people there. It is around the 1750s that Inquisitor monks first began to wear red hoods to mask their identity when "interviewing" those that might recognize them later. The brand of religious zeal wielded by the "red cloaks" was not welcomed, and added to the growing political unrest. In 1762, the Inquisition was expelled from the western provinces by the newly formed Confederation of Cardiel.

This was not achieved without resistance. Templars and Church backed mercenaries clashed with Cardien forces on the plain of Lympus, about 60 miles northeast of Calder. The battle of the Apple Orchard (Lympus is a fertile citrus-growing area) was of a relatively small scale, but particularly brutal.

The Church forces seemed to have the day won, after crashing through the Cardien lines and overlapping the right flank. Suddenly, the Church mercenaries left the field (Cardien coin was later found on them), leaving the 21 Templars and two Olybrian Inquisitors alone on the field. They refused an offer of terms. Setting themselves for a final stand, the Templars were given the time to confess their sins and hear mass. On a small hill lined with flowing apple boughs heavy with fruit and lush green grass that would soon flow with blood, the "Holy Score and Three" (as bards in Megalos would later refer to them) managed to kill 964 Cardien soldiers before they were finally crushed. They held out for an entire turn of the clock, with only one knight left alive -- his right arm severed in the fight -- to inform the Curia that Cardiel no longer would permit the Church to put its citizens to the flames so easily. The knight, Sir Kethadon, was hailed a hero. The tale of "the Holy Score and Three" is still popular today, and the strategies used by the Templars in the battle of the Apple Orchard are well studied by all students of military matters.

In 1824, Inquisition monks were sent to Caithness to investigate heresies performed under the Archbishop of Clixus, Constantine. They were expelled personally by Earl Conall of Craine in July 1825, which help lead to the mass excommunication of Caithness in 1826.

As they were increasingly unable to operate as they would wish to outside the Empire, the Inquisition became more involved in internal matters within the borders of Megalos. They had some involvement in the Mages' War of 1924-1928, providing magical aid and religious rationalization. Several red-robed monks were martyred by the Muslims in Bannock during the spring of 1925. One of them, a Brother Osprey of Arvey, was said to have returned from death during a decisive battle known as the Battle of Dark Gull Cove. Fifty miles northeast along the coastline of Keyhole Bay, Dark Gull Cove was the scene of a pitched land/sea battle that helped end the war in 1928. The immortal form of Osprey was seen by many eyewitnesses to appear clad in silver armor with his Inquisitor's red robe about him, slashing the infidel with a scythe made from light itself!

In 1935, he became Saint Osprey of the Scythe. He is considered the patron saint of Holy vengeance and inquisition.

In the present day, Inquisition monks can be found in any of the Christian nations, though they are severely restrained in Cardiel. Agents of the Inquisition, known to the Church as Brokers, are also active throughout Christendom.

The current Grand Inquisitor is Father Allynus of New Jerusalem. Allynus is young, dedicated, energetic, and the most charismatic leader the Inquisition has had since Robert Lebougre. He has held his position for two years now, and is just getting a handle on the logistics of his command. There is currently an inquisition being held in Myrgan and one in Sho'joor which he takes an active role in supervising. His ultimate dreams lay, like so many of his predecessors,

north. He has spies among the barbarians, and he is currently collecting information on the mines on the Whitehoods, and how to best penetrate them. He is a careful, intelligent man, and will only strike when he has the forces he needs and the path prepared. But he is confident that he can do it in his lifetime . . .

Structure

The Congregation of the Holy Inquisition has, by its nature, a loose structure. Technically, it is simply an arm of the Curia that comes into existence when required, i.e. when a matter of heresy needs to be investigated. When there is no Inquisition in progress, the monks, including the Grand Inquisitor, return to their normal duties within their respective abbeys. However, in practice there has not been a time when an ongoing Inquisition has *not* been occurring somewhere since 1705. The length of time an Inquisition can continue is somewhat like the length of the proverbial piece of string. The Grand Inquisitor knows that if there is no Inquisition, he loses a large portion of his influence in the Curia, so he will easily be able to keep some form of investigation going at all times.

For an Inquisition to begin, first a matter of heresy must come before the Curia. This can be initiated by a local priest who has a concern in his area, a wandering Olybrian or other monk who has witnessed something disturbing, or a Broker making a deliberate pre-investigation. The Curia will judge whether the matter should be brought before the Grand Inquisitor, who then decides if an Inquisition is required.

If so, the Grand Inquisitor will dispatch monks to the area, backed up by Templars and Templar sergeant-at-arms. This is called a Tribunal. If he is not attending personally, he will appoint an Inquisitor General. On some occasions a complement or even an entire Legion will be ordered to attend the sight of an Inquisition, particularly if the Emperor has political interest in the area. The local priests and bishop of the area being investigated would announce the impending Inquisition well before it arrived, ensuring that as many people as possible would know when and where it would be holding its court. This court usually takes place in a local monastery in the diocese. Even after the Inquisition arrives, a "Grace" period of no less than one month begins. During this time, heretics could confess their sins, hear admonitions, and receive forgiveness and their penalties. The customary penalties for such recanting heretics could be as little as fasts, pilgrimages, or prayer, but there would also generally be some form of monetary/goods penalty.

During the Grace, the mostly Olybrian monks would also conduct some serious religious revival services, with a great deal of preaching and pastoral work. Also, the Inquisitors call for reports and accusations against the suspected heretics from the general population.

Both the forewarning and the Grace can be ignored if the Grand Inquisitor believes that these actions could "jeopardize the investigation by allowing heretics to relocate themselves under haste." Thus, it is possible for red robed monks and armor-clad Templars to descend suddenly and without warning upon a suspect community, taking suspects into custody immediately. The local priest, who may have lodged the original point of concern, could well be horrified by such an action, but no doubt would generally have the sense not to voice his disapproval with too much conviction . . .

Afterward, the Inquisition begins.

The initial purpose of an Inquisition is to judge whether heresy is occurring. For a person to be judged a heretic, the Church is under three Obligations:

1. On the question that has caused the Inquisition to be called, the Church must have a stated orthodox position, either within the Domitian Code or in a later Decree.
2. It must have repeatedly declared to the individual, through a cleric, the error of his ways and the correct position.
3. The Church has to show that the heresy has been communicated to others in some way, by word or deed, and that this could have influenced others.

If heresy is then found, the investigation begins. Those accused are made to attend the court and be judged according to at least two witnesses accounts. The witnesses could be anyone from criminals to small children, but the accused are permitted to name any "mortal enemies" whose accounts should not be heard. The accused does not confront these

witnesses, though they would be named in the hearing. The Accused also has a right to a defense lawyer and witnesses, though this right is almost worthless because people are generally too afraid to speak on the behalf of a suspected heretic lest they themselves become suspect.

If the judges come to the conclusion that the accused is a heretic, but can not obtain a voluntary confession, torture is deemed an appropriate recourse.

If the accused is found guilty of heresy, a sentence is decided upon. Death is generally reserved only for a heretic who refuses to recant his/her beliefs or a member that has been judged heretic before and has now relapsed. The death sentence is almost always done by burning at the stake, though if the weather is inclement, hanging is an alternative. Other major penalties that can be used at the Inquisitors discretion are: excommunication, exile, slavery, permanent imprisonment, confiscation of all property/funds (a very common occurrence), and maiming/forehead branding. Minor penalties include pilgrimages, wearing of a cross, monetary fines, flogging, and temporary imprisonment.

A clergyman found guilty of serious heresy is sent to a monastery, under guard, to be "put at peace." This means to be bricked into an underground section of the monastery foundation with a bible, and thus buried alive.

There is an office of the Inquisition in New Jerusalem, Megalos City, and at Lebougre Abbey of Rogald, the spiritual heart and training center for the Inquisition. Unknown to most people, there is also some form of magical communication with the above offices at almost every Olybrian Abbey in Ytarria.

Personnel

The position of Grand Inquisitor, the leader of the Congregation of the Holy Inquisition, is a powerful, much feared, and respected role. When the position becomes vacant, it is traditionally first offered to the Head Abbot of the Olybrian Order, who may either accept and fulfil both roles, or decline and then decide for himself who should serve as leader of the *Inquisitio*.

The Inquisition recruits its monks directly from the major orders of the Church. Although almost exclusively Olybrian, there are usually several of the more hard-line Franciscans and Constantinians involved. All Inquisition monks must serve at the monastery at Rogald for a period of time, where they learn more about the history of the Congregation and study deeply many learned texts on how to best investigate heresy. Some of these valuable scrolls were written by Robert Lebougre himself.

Skills taught include Bard, Accounting, Law, History (Inquisition), Occultism, Psychology, Administration, Diplomacy, Performance, Savoir-faire, Theology (Catholic), Detect Lies, Interrogation, Intimidation, and Intelligence Analysis.

Instruction in the very basic spells of the Body Control, Mind Control, Communication/Empathy, Information, and Knowledge Colleges are available to those with magical aptitude. If particular magical talent is noticed at Rogald, the monk can be sent to study at Azer, the Templar College of Battle Magic. There they delve further into the more advanced spells of the above colleges, as well as looking at optional strains of magic; the Fire College is particularly popular . . . Once having attended Azer, the monk is know as a Magus Inquisitio, and afforded additional respect from his brethren.

The distinctive red habits, worn by Inquisition monks since the 1750s, are only required to be worn when at court (hearing an Inquisition) or while interrogating a suspect. If blood is likely to be shed during the interrogation, or during an execution, the hood with two eye slits is worn, covering the entire head. Otherwise, the normal plain black robe of the monks order is often worn so that no one is able to differentiate the Inquisitor from a normal cleric.

Agents of the Inquisition (Brokers)

These men (and sometimes women!) are not cloistered, but trained at Rogald in arts of subterfuge and spycraft. They are sent out into the nations with assumed names and credentials to observe and report on heretical practices. They all

have a small pebble implanted beneath the skin that gives off a certain Aura, only noticeable by a trained Olybrian, which identifies them as a Broker at any Olybrian Abbey and gives them access to the communication equipment.

Skills taught to Brokers at Rogald include: Tracking, Stealth, Shadowing, Lockpicking, Detect Lies, Disguise, Acting, Occultism, Theology (Catholic), Law, Heraldry, Navigation and Area Knowledge (Olybrian Abbeys). This last skill allows the Broker to make regular contact with a superior and report their findings back to the Congregation.

Brokers are often sent out to areas where unreliable sources have indicated there may be heresy occurring. This is called a Pre-Investigation. The Broker will generally act as a transient worker/mercenary of some sort and see what they can dig up. When not directly involved in a Pre-Investigation, Brokers wander the countryside sponsored by the Church. They are the active eyes and ears to the black stain of heresy.

Current Events

The Caves of the Lyndynites

An Inquisitorial Tribunal has been hearing evidence for the past six months at Asburghe Abbey in Sho'joor. Father Allynus is personally running this investigation into a cult known as the Lyndynites. Lyndyn Southman was a sailor in the employ of the Duke until he was laid off when there was a shipping crisis five years ago. During the next two years he disappeared for some time, but when he resurfaced he claimed to have seen the afterlife and been told how to achieve its riches. Lyndyn began preaching a religion based on sea creatures and the holiness of the oceans. He claimed that the sea was a spiritual conduit to the innermost essence of existence, as well as claiming that there were strange fish-men who were chosen prophets of God. Most thought him a harmless madman, but after a few years, he actually managed to build up a following where he based himself in the cliff face caves along the treacherous shore line south of the city. The Fishmen (p. FF70) actually have a major sacrifice that they wish to perform at an exact point of time at a site in Sho'joor. They plan to sack the entire city and hold it for one day, harvesting from the land-dwellers as many lives as possible to aid the potency of the ritual, then retreat back to their ancient underwater metropolis some 300 miles out to sea. They do not have the numbers to win through sheer force, so they have used Lyndyn to recruit a group of land-dwelling "zealots" to assist them.

An "artifact" that the fishmen gave Lyndyn while they converted him (he fully believes in his new religion) is a small head circlet made of tiny shells. It is actually enchanted with Foolishness (-4 IQ, always on 20 yard radius, doesn't effect wearer) and Conceal Magic (-8), which helps convince his flock of his "revelations."

Just like Lyndyn, Allynus has no idea about these plans. He believes that this is just another upstart pagan cult that he will crush with ease. The caves that the heretics are hiding in do present a problem as they are extensive and warren-like. Not believing this issue important enough to involve an entire Templar cadre, he is looking for mercenaries to root the pagans out of their holes by the sea. The pay is good and the work looks easy . . .

Intrigue in the Hospital

Troubling reports of heretical teachings have been made to the Grand Inquisitor about the Hospital in New Jerusalem. Father Allynus is horrified that the inner sanctum of the Order of the Hospital could be teaching such things as partial spiritual reincarnation. The Curia cannot be officially informed on any Inquisitional proceedings because Bishop Activus Lynnich of New Jerusalem is implicated. Father Allynus needs to treat this situation with kid gloves as the political ramifications of these canonical breaches are huge. There are Templars in the city, although their movements are restricted to limit them purely to their official role of guarding Church grounds. More information is desperately required of the liturgy being taught within the Hospital itself. Five brokers have already "gone missing" attempting to infiltrate the organization, as have two undercover Templars.

Lord Dorset Longfellow, a landed noble retained by the Inquisition to look into the situation at a higher level, has also just disappeared in the last few days. The Hospital have released a statement to the Curia and the Emperor's court that he was abducted by a group of disguised Kharijites. Sir Guildford Perrennius, who personally delivered the message to

Megalos City, is using this to further his argument for a concerted New Crusade. Dorset actually languishes in the lowest dungeon the Hospital has to offer, with his eyes put out for his attempted spycraft. The liturgy used by the Hospital has deviated somewhat from the canon, but nowhere near to the extent reported. The Temple are deliberately exaggerating the information being presented to the Grand Inquisitor in the hope that an official Inquisition would be called for. The damage this would cause to the reputation of the Hospital, even when most of the allegations are proved incorrect, will cost them in the eyes of Christendom.

The Templars will take a dim view of outsiders coming in to investigate and possibly reveal the truth. Four of the five brokers that have "gone missing" were killed by Temple, not Hospital knights.

Sir Geoffrey Freeman believes he finally has the numbers within the Order to oust the current Grand Master and place himself at the position. He recently survived an assassination attempt by the *hashishin* as he left mass. Geoffrey immediately blamed the infidel and even hinted that Guildford may have been involved in attempting to silence the ". . . true scourge of the heathen and satanic unbelievers." In truth, he and his immediate supporters arranged the murder attempt, which certainly helped him survive it, in an effort to win over support for his claim to the leadership.

The Old Man of the Mountain has only just found out that his sect was used in this way. A real assassination is now planned.

Worthy of note is that the Hospitalers are very susceptible to magical information gathering, though they are very good at mundane counter-spy techniques.

More trusted outsiders are needed by the Inquisition to act as brokers and find out what is really going on in New Jerusalem. Another noble is also required to ask questions at the Hospital court. The resulting turmoil could shake the foundations of the military orders, maybe resulting in open civil warfare! Add to this a group of real Kharijites, disguised as cloth merchants, who plan on setting fire to the Grand Hospital itself, and an explosive situation is certainly in the making.

On the Trail of Thulin's Soul (and riches)

At Rogald Abbey, Brother Amalric Bloodblade, an ex-Templar who became a monk of the Inquisition, has been put in charge of the Revival in the Northern Lands. He has a converted and money-hungry dwarf by the name of Dusselhoov Tweed who claims to know of a secret entrance to the mines of the Whitehoods, as well as a somewhat trouble-free passage through to the north. Amalric wants a group to go with Tweed and map out the route, as well as take notes on the feasibility of a campaign through the mountains. Bloodblade is obsessed with crushing the dwarves. He has studied all the material of the 1585 debacle and has dedicated his life to understanding the strategic problems associated with predominately subterranean combat. Although the mission is extremely high risk, a huge chest of gold is offered, as well as a guaranteed place in heaven and an opportunity to pilfer some of the legendary treasure rooms of Thulin's Folk with a local dwarf.

The only problem is that Tweed is actually a Zarakian renegade. Although he does know about the secret entrance, he will be mostly guessing from there. If the party ever gets in serious trouble, he will try to just meld into the surroundings and pull some fast talk about being captured and forced at knife point to accompany the surface-dwellers.

As luck would have it, a High Council has been called in Zarak which Thulin has decided to attend. The halls and tunnels on the far east of the range are somewhat deserted due to the drain in dwarfpower. Maybe the party will win through to the other side with their heads intact and a sack full of booty . . .

When Good LARPerS Go Bad

by KT Pinto

Running a LARP is a piece of cake. All you have to do is write up a brief storyline and then the players take over. Simple, right? Although this theory looks good on paper, running a LARP is much more difficult than it seems . . . especially when there is a problem gamer in your midst. One bad player can bring down the entire game and make other players wary of coming back. Over the past year our group has had three such players. In this article, I will tell you how we handled these three troublemakers and still kept the rest of our players happy and returning.

(Names have been changed to save me some grief.)

The Apathetic Bad Guy

When we first started preparing the storyline for our *Vampire: The Dark Ages* chronicle, Gwain offered to play the bad guy, a villainous Tzimisce lord named L----. Since all of our events are run by the efforts of volunteers, we were more than happy to give him the role. For those that are not familiar with *The Dark Ages* games system, the Tzimisce are vampiric flesh crafters in the guise of high-class lords and ladies. In theory, their high positions in society gives them the power and prestige they need to work on their evil plans. Gwain had the wealthy lord part down. He would look down his nose at other characters and talk with an air that told others they were in the presence of someone they didn't want to annoy. The downside to this wonderfully evil character was that Gwain avoided playing the evil part.

Imagine Darth Vader without the somber music and black armor, and that was Gwain's character. It got to the point that the other characters weren't even interested in killing him anymore. They just let him become prince without putting up an argument. Honestly, of all the problems a GM can have in game, indifference is the worst. I even had my character go up to him when his character became prince and outright insult him, believing that he would injure me and send my followers into a tizzy, giving the players a scene they would be interested in. Instead of retaliating, Gwain's character just chuckled amiably and walked away. We decided then that something drastic had to be done to save this game.

Before the staff could decide what to do, Gwain had his character destroy a major port city two days before our next planned LARP. Needless to say that we were completely surprised, as was the gamer playing the prince of the port city. We believed, since Gwain was a storyteller, he had had a game plan, so we went with it. Silly us. He dropped the bomb (so to speak), and then left it up to us to pick up the pieces. That was it . . . Gwain had to go.

But how were we to do this without looking like the bad guys? Gwain had this annoying habit of acting like a good ol' boy and, although he infuriated most of the staff and players, he had become friends with a small handful who would have probably left the game if we had just kicked him off staff. This is where tact had to come into play . . . and that is something we all had very little experience in.

The final conclusion was to use his own words against him. He was constantly complaining how his wife, his job, his girlfriend, and gaming were taking up way too much of his time, so we happily helped him by reducing his responsibilities within the group to the point that he could only adjudicate during LARPs. He was no longer able to make up storylines and the players were informed that anything Gwain told them had to be verified through us. As we had hoped, he saw this as a major insult and dropped off of staff. There was no way anyone could blame us for his leaving. They had all heard him complain about his tight schedule and saw what we did as a favor to him . . . and to them.

The first game after he quit was one of our most exciting. We put his character into Torpor (a vampiric coma) and had the players go through a labyrinth to find and kill him. We are now at the beginning of a new chronicle, and the players are eager and excited both during and between games. Getting Gwain off of the staff was the best thing we could have done for the game, and the way we did it moved us up a few notches in the players eyes.

The Singing Toreador

"Her name was Lola, she was a showgirl . . . "

At least, that was what she believed her character was. Lola was playing a Toreador (the artsy vampiric clan) whose art form was swordplay. This was actually an intriguing character to us, because normally an inexperienced player would pick a Toreador character to stay out of the fight scenes, and choose an art form like dancing or singing. Lola's character was a bodyguard whose charge had been killed under her watch, and she was supposed to be out for revenge.

The problems occurred during the games involving contests and competitions. Every time Lola's character competed, she would sing. Not only was this not consistent with her character's profile and background, but Lola would pick the longest, most boring songs ever made. Her voice was lovely, no doubt about that, but she bored the hell out of the rest of the players.

The first time she performed, we believed that she was just nervous, and was doing something that she was comfortable with until she got used to her character. But this excuse didn't work after the second competition . . . or the third. We decided that the next time she chose singing instead of swordplay, we were going to have to do something drastic. The next competition occurred at the same LARP where Gwain's character destroyed the port city. So, we had the competition's location in a neutral territory as a celebration for those who survived. Lola was the third one to perform. She walked up on stage . . . and started to sing. You could almost hear the groan from the players.

After the first refrain, we had the neutral territory attacked by flesh-crafted monsters, cutting the competition short. The players all rushed out of the room, eager to destroy and maim. Imagine our surprise when Lola griped to her friends and her friends complained to us after the game because she didn't get to finish her song. We had to figure out what to do next. We couldn't ask the other players if her songs bored them as well, because then we would be reducing ourselves to Lola's high school tactics. So, trying to keep the peace, we had the competition run again at the next LARP. Lola got up and once again began to sing.

I made sure to stay out of any pictures taken while she sang -- I didn't want anyone to see the total lack of interest on my face. I shouldn't have worried. The pictures of our players showed that same look of boredom. The morale of the story -- if something is boring you, chances are it's boring your players as well. Remember, although you are a GM, you are a player at heart and if you feel a storyline dragging, your players are feeling it as well. We finally told Lola that she had to start playing her character the way she was created -- with a sword -- or to make a new character. She hasn't sung since then, and our players now look forward to upcoming competitions.

The Negative Staffer

We had met Selene at a gaming convention several states away, where she lives. When we invited her to our games, which are held in our home state, we really didn't expect her to show. Not only did she come, but also brought her friend Elvis, her boyfriend, and Elvis' girlfriend along for the ride. She helped out with setup and takedown, offered suggestions for the storyline, and played a character that both entertained and involved the other players. Because of all this, we offered her a position on the staff, which she accepted. At the same time, we also offered Elvis a staff position. He had been helping out with storylines, characters, and setup as well, and played a character that eagerly tried to tick everyone off. He gave the players an enthusiastic target, and they loved it. He likewise agreed to join the staff. This is when the problems started.

Unbeknownst to us, Selene had become jealous over the fact that my husband and I had become good friends with Elvis and his girlfriend. She didn't like that our schedules let the four of us get together outside of the LARPs and staff meetings, and took out her jealousy on the organization.

Any time we held a staff meeting, she would disagree with every suggestion a staffer gave, whether it dealt with the characters, storyline, or players. Not only did she contradict everything that was said but she didn't give any reasons

why. She would just say, "No, that won't work." or "No, that's not a good idea." It got to the point at one meeting that Elvis had to get up and leave before he knocked her out. Needless to say we got no work done that day. This also extended to our meetings in cyberspace. She would accuse us of giving favor to those players that live locally in the home state, repeated everything that was written by others with the thought that we didn't understand what was being said, and then told us in a blanket statement that we were wrong. It was time to get rid of her.

This time we didn't think about it. She was bringing the staff down, and thereby bringing the entire group down. It was a choice between her and the game. We told her that it had nothing to do with our friendship; it was solely a LARP decision. She decided it was personal, and won't come back to any games. The staff and the LARP have been running better than ever. The moral -- if someone is lowering the morale of the staff, she is also doing it to the players and the game.

Conclusion

Whenever you have a problem player or staffer in your group, you have to make your decision following this belief -- the choice comes down to the happiness and pleasure of the one or the many. The many should win out every time.

Pyramid Review

Slaves of Fate (for d20)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Jason Durall

Illustrated by Chris Appel, Rob Hinds and Drashi Khendup

88 pgs; \$15.95

Chaosium, Inc. was among the first companies to take advantage of the Open Gaming License to produce a *d20* system version of one of their own already existing games. This was *Dragon Lords of Melniboné*, a *d20* version of their *Etric! RPG* -- itself more recently rereleased in a fifth edition and renamed *Stormbringer* once again, which still employed their "Basic Role-Play" system for its mechanics. The result was a game set within Michael Moorcock's The Young Kingdoms that had a slightly more heroic swords and sorcery feel.

Also promised at the time of *Dragon Lords of Melniboné's* release was an introductory scenario for the *d20* rules, called *Slaves of Fate*. During the long delay between the announcement and its publication, this adventure has ballooned from thirty-two pages to first sixty-four and finally eighty-eight pages. This scenario is designed for a party of approximately 4 to 8 characters of 1st to 3rd levels, and is intended to initiate new players to the Million Spheres.

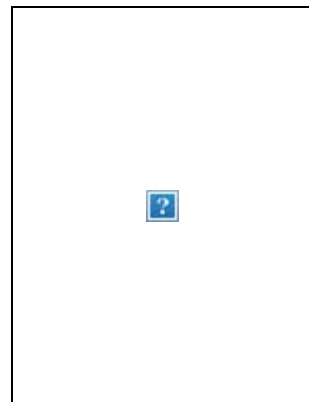
Slaves of Fate comes with an attractive cover by Chris Appel and is clearly and simply laid out inside. The quality of the internal artwork is not of a standard seen in other Chaosium books, although Drashi Khendup's illustrations have a certain dynamic quality, capturing the dynamism of the scenes they depict rather well. Likewise, his maps are nicely done. Finally, the book does not come with an index, but does have a decent contents page at the front.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The adventure opens with the characters chained in a line within the hold of a ship. At this point, all they know is that within the past few days or so, they had an encounter that resulted in their losing consciousness. Several suggestions are made as to what might have happened, and these could be played out before *Slaves of Fate* begins. Naturally, the only remnants of the possessions they once had are the clothes that they are wearing. Through interaction with the other prisoners, they can learn that they are aboard the *Virago*, a Vilmirian pirate vessel that has turned its hand to slavery. Shortly, the ship will heave to and those in the hold are brought to the top deck, where they will discover their fate -- they are to be sold into the service of the evil, Chaos-worshipping Pan Tang nation!

Some players may object to having their characters railroaded into this situation, but the "Slaves to the Narrative" section explains how to get around this -- in the main by getting through the opening scenes without either the DM or the players dawdling. At the same time, this setup is actually an advantage for what is an introductory scenario. It gets around the artificiality of getting a disparate band of characters together -- in other words, a player could roll up any Young Kingdoms character that they wanted -- and it also gives them an up-front motivation and purpose in playing, whatever their character background or objectives might be.

Once the Pan Tang ship, *Chardros' Lament*, ties up alongside the *Virago*, the Pan Tangians will come aboard to make their purchases. Normally, they would buy in bulk, but today they are after just a select one or two. Making the selection is Omerginroul, a strange demon-like creature, which is held on a leash by the wizard-priest of Ariocho,



Hasper Dal. Omerginroul is a Silune, an extra-planar creature, with the ability to planar travel once per day. This requires a small amount of blood from someone . . . willing or unwilling. Hasper Dal believes that he will be able to use his pet's ability for his own ends, but really the Silune wants to escape captivity and rescue his mate who is held captive on another plane. To this end, Omerginroul has told Dal that he requires the blood of someone special -- in other words, the player characters or one of their fellow slaves!

As the deal is about to be cut, a Melnibonéan battle-barge appears on an intercept course and all hell breaks loose . . . The pirates want to grab the Pan Tangian funds, the crew of the Chardros' Lament want to escape and leave the Virago to the mercy of the Melnibonéans, while Hasper Dal does not want to leave without gaining possession of the slaves. The Silune takes advantage of the sudden chaos to get the blood he requires and open up the gate he wants . . . Which has the unfortunate side effect of drawing both the Virago and the Chardros' Lament through to who knows where? All they can see on the other side of the gate is a ferocious storm.

When the characters awake, they find themselves shipwrecked around a strange island. The setup finds them dotted round the shores of the island, mixed up with their fellow slaves as well as their former captors and potential owners. This is an opportunity for the characters to really mix it up and interact with the NPCs in *Slaves of Fate*, and for the DM to present these NPCs as characters. The situation may find the separated characters making alliances with different factions and it also represents something of a challenge to the DM, as they have to switch back and forth between the various NPCs dealing with the characters. Of course, one option would be to run this section of *Slaves of Fate* with all of the player characters being shipwrecked all together and awake in just the one location. Naturally, doing so would be a lot easier, but would miss on a great deal of the scenario's potential.

Getting off the strange storm-swept island will take the remainder of the adventure. The players will need to make their alliances, explore the island, and deal with the strange inhabitants if they are to do so. The DM is given a timetable of events, but does not have to adhere to it strictly. How the end of *Slaves of Fate* comes about is really down to what the player characters do and how they deal with those around them; while in the opening chapter they can be said to be the "slaves of fate," it is not the case by the very end, where they make their own fate. There is no set ending, but rather suggestions are made as to what it might be.

[END SPOILER]

While *Slaves of Fate* is an introductory scenario, it is not suitable for a novice DM to run. There are lots of NPCs to handle and keep track of, and switching back and forth between them will need to be done with care if the players are not to suffer periods of boredom between their scenes. On the other hand, the players need to be aware of this and accept it as part of the adventure. All that aside, the adventure gives plenty of advice that both the novice and experienced DM will find useful in running *Slaves of Fate*.

For an Open Gaming License product, *Slaves of Fate* has little to add to the Open Gaming License. These come down the new creature, the Silune, a new poison and the Slaver as a sub-class of the NPC expert class. Although the adventure does not necessarily require the use of the *Dragon Lords of Melniboné* book, it really does work better if the DM has a copy and has his players create their characters from it. Also, the scene where chaos breaks out aboard the two ships into a big fight will be easier to run using the guidelines for mass combat found in *Dragon Lords of Melniboné*.

For referees who already own a copy of *Dragon Lords of Melniboné*, this reasonably priced new scenario should prove a must buy. *Slaves of Fate* is a great way to introduce both new and *d20* system players to the Young Kingdoms.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Dvonn

Published by [Don and Co/Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by **Kris Burm**

49 playing pieces, 1 game board, and rulebook; \$29.95

Abstract strategy games have a tough life in the 21st century. Not only must they compete with collectible card games, roleplaying games, video games, and snacks, they also go head to head with classics of the genre that never seem to die such as Chess and Go. Add to this the growing library of free abstract strategy games for generic pieces such as *Icehouse: The Martian Chess Set* and *Piecepack*, and designing a marketable abstract strategy game seems impossible.

Dvonn, the latest two player game in the [Gipf Project](#), may have what it takes to carve a niche for itself. It contains beautiful high-quality components, fascinating game mechanics, and, as a member of the Gipf Project, it expands an interlocking series of games.

Dvonn comes with 49 sturdy, plastic disks that stack nicely and have a speckled, marbled look. The board is made from durable cardboard and displays textured art that looks like a stone table covered with sand. The 49 circle grid on the board fades in and out to further the illusion. Like all of the games in the Gipf Project, *Dvonn* has a solid aesthetic sense that makes the game almost as attractive to observe as it is fun to play.

The game begins with players alternating turns placing the three red Dvonn pieces on the board. Then they alternate placing their own disks, 23 white and 23 black. The player with the advantage of placing two of the red *Dvonn* pieces has the disadvantage of moving first in the second phase of the game.

For the rest of the game, players alternate moving one of their own pieces on top of another piece. They may also move a stack of pieces that they control. A player controls a stack if the top piece in the stack is their own color. The catch is that a stack must move in a straight line and must move as many spaces as it has pieces. Stacks may cross over blank spaces, but they must always finish their move on top of a space already occupied by one or more pieces of any color.

At first, most moves consist of transferring a single piece one space and on top of another piece. As the stacks become larger, they become harder to move because the number of occupied spaces is dwindling. At the same time, tall stacks must move further, cutting their options severely.

As if this were not agonizing enough, any pieces that are not connected via a line of occupied spaces to a stack containing a red Dvonn piece are immediately removed from the game. Thus, a single move may isolate several stacks which removes them from the game and from the final score.

The game continues until neither player can make a legal move. Players then take all of the stacks they control, place them into a single group, and the tallest tower wins.

Like all great abstract strategy games, the rules are simple but actual play is complex. Players have to balance aggressive moves to take control of tall stacks while not opening profitable moves for their opponents. At the same time, pieces must be linked to the red Dvonn pieces, so you must ensure your taller stacks can not be cut off and removed. This rule also allows come from behind wins, making Dvonn very dramatic compared to other abstract

Pyramid Review: Dvonn



strategy games.

Dvonn stands on its own as an clever and strategic game, but its relationship to the rest of the Gipf Project makes it even more attractive. The Gipf Project is a series of abstract strategy games that contains the namesake **Gipf**, the hourglass based **Tamsk**, and the Checkers-like **Zertz**. The games are related because the pieces in the later games can be used in the original Gipf game to add new types of moves. Players can either agree to allow certain pieces into the **Gipf** game or, for those looking for a long evening of strategy, they can pause a **Gipf** game to play a game of **Tamsk**, **Zertz**, or **Dvonn** for the right to use one of those pieces in the paused game. Alone or with its brethren, **Dvonn** proves there is still room for abstract strategy games in today's market.

--Brad Weier

Error Reading Disk: Invoke/Retry/Summon?

"Every day, in all my waking hours, my mind would run, over and over again, through the Minoan Greek text of the Phaistos Disk, searching for possible grammatical inconsistencies . . . I just couldn't escape the cerebral whirlpool. I felt like the final victim of the Battle of Naxos. Though the move to Meersburg had helped tremendously, I felt trapped. The long strolls along the shore and through the vineyards had calmed my nerves, but they failed to calm my mind. The Phaistos Disk was driving me mad."

-- Steven Roger Fischer, *Glyphbreaker*

The tiny figures march from the outside of the Disk in a spiral pattern, moving inward endlessly to their single, unknowable goal. In a quarter-kilobyte, the Phaistos Disk, a CD-ROM four millennia old, holds prayers, or rituals, or obeisance, or the secret names of the gods of Atlantis. Like the [Copper Scroll](#), the [Voynich Manuscript](#), or the [Glozel Fragments](#), the Phaistos Disk is [bisociation](#) given form. Locked into a linguistic black box, it holds literally unspeakable words, keeping them ready for an ancient purpose long buried with the palace of the King of Hell. Only the tiny figures know what they seek, at the center of the spiral. And they're not telling.

"Hear ye, Cretans and Greeks: my great, my quick! Hear ye, Danaidans, the great, the worthy! Hear ye, all blacks, and hear ye, Punt and Libya! Hear ye, waters, yea earth: Hellas faces battle with the Carians. Hear ye all! Hear ye, Gods of the Fleet!"

-- from the Fischer translation of the Phaistos Disk

On the southern coast of Crete lies (or lay, before it fell and the shoreline moved) the city of Phaistos, one of the famous "palace cities" of the Minoan Empire. While excavating Phaistos on July 3, 1908, the Italian archaeologist Luigi Pernier discovered a red clay disk about five inches in diameter, fired hard (possibly by the cataclysm that destroyed the palace around 1700 B.C.) and incised on both sides with 241 symbols, arranged in a spiral pattern of 61 "words" set off by lines. (You can see a nice shot of the Phaistos Disk [here](#), and [this site](#) gives a good, clear view of the glyphs.) The symbols did not precisely match any known script or alphabet, although there were some similarities with the Minoan script known as Linear A. Even more mysteriously, the repeating symbols (from an "alphabet" of 45 different glyphs) matched precisely; it became apparent that the Phaistos Disk had been printed using, essentially, movable metal type -- three thousand years before Gutenberg! There are other "metal-punch" designs in the area, most notably the glazed-clay Cycladic "frying-pan" artifacts (some as old as 2000 B.C.) which sport repeated symbols as designs, not inscriptions. But there are no other inscriptions in the Phaistos Disk alphabet, and no other evidence of movable-type printing in the region whatsoever. Whoever printed the Disk used an anachronistic technology to write a message in an unknown alphabet -- and left no further trace behind.

"The general character of the hieroglyphic script [of the Phaistos Disk] presents, in any case, a close parallel with the Minoan, and a certain proportion of the signs are identical."

-- Sir Arthur Evans, *Scripta Minoa I* (1909)

From the very first, controversy raged over the Phaistos Disk and its inscription. Sir Arthur Evans, the excavator of Knossos, maintained that the Disk might have been an import from Anatolia, given the absence of similar remains in Crete. Other scholars back a Greek or Minoan origin or translation of the inscription, most notably Steven Roger Fischer, whose book *Glyphbreaker* sets out an intellectually-sound (if still essentially circular) argument for the Disk as the record of a call to warfare by the Minoans against the Carian pirates of the coast (a war recorded by Thucydides as an ancient tradition). Still other scholars have rendered the inscription on the Disk as a prayer in Greek, a dedication of the palace in Hittite, a magical incantation in proto-Byblic, a Minoan calendar or almanac (presumably in a Linear A variant), a diplomatic message or tribute inventory in "proto-Ionic" from one of Crete's satellite states on the Anatolian coast, a funerary record in ancient Syriac, and an "Etrusco-Luwian" hymn to Poseidon Hippios and Cybele Ax-Mother. One decipherment splits the difference and says that Side A is Mycenaean Greek and Side B is (presumably "Minoan") Linear A. There is, at least, some evidence that the two sides were printed by different "hands", and slightly less evidence that the two sides were once separate sheets of clay, joined later in the firing process.

"Sadly, the disk slowly came under the domination of less than scientific attempts to crack the riddle, such that today few researchers dare to forward any new theories, lest they too be grouped with a discredited fringe. Indeed, many scholars, when approached to comment on the Phaistos Disk react as though it were leprous."

-- Kevin Massey-Gillespie and Keith Massey, *Mysteries of History Solved!*

Other theories skip the firing process altogether, so to speak. Purely by coincidence, a Russian enthusiast named Sergei Rjabchikov has decided that both Linear A and the Disk are Slavonic, and that the Disk is a prayer to the Slavic bull-goddess Yanila. The mad epigrapher Barry Fell translated the Disk as an augury, written in a combination Hittite-Polynesian dialect of (apparently) his own devising. In *The Bronze Age Computer Disc*, engineer Alan Butler determined that the Phaistos Disk recapitulates an "incredibly accurate" 366-day calendar, tied to a 366-degree circle which, after suitably tautological massaging, proves that the Minoans built Stonehenge (or the other way around) and knew the circumference of the Earth to within 12 yards. To Butler, the Phaistos Disk ties time, distance, and geometry together in a wondrous salad fraught with spooky interpretation. Some New Age theories go further still, positing the Phaistos Disk as an Egyptian "portal disk" that recapitulated the [sacred geometry](#) of the Great Pyramid to allow Osirian initiates to create a "group consciousness" and enter the astral realm! (For safety's sake, one Phaistos website urges you to shut off your computer while performing the Phaistos Ritual -- incompatible file formats, apparently.)

*"But the immortal ends of all the earth,
So ruled by them that order death by birth,
The fields Elysian, Fate to thee will give;
Where Rhadamanthus rules, and where men live
A never-troubled life, where snow, nor showers,
Nor irksome Winter spends his fruitless powers,
But from the ocean Zephyr still resumes
A constant breath, that all the fields perfumes."*

-- Homer, *Odyssey*, Book IV

In this vein, the Disk (with or without portal magic or geometric mathematics) might have been a key to the jealously-guarded Minoan treasure houses far to the west -- in America. Phaistos was, after all, the city of Rhadamanthus, brother of Minos and later ruler of Elysium, the "isle of the blessed" also far to the west across the Ocean. The Minoans needed copper, which was there for the taking in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Someone certainly mined tons of the stuff there between approximately 3000 and 1200 B.C.; the traditional "Copper Culture" ingots can be found all over the American Midwest -- and bear a striking resemblance to the "oxhide" ingots of copper used by the Minoans. Similar ingots can be seen on Egyptian wall paintings held by red people "three years journey to the west," identified as "Keftiu" -- Cretans. Minoan Crete has been pegged as [Atlantis](#), of course, which also lay over the sea to the West and sported great masses of orichalcum -- "mountain copper." Did the Minoans churn their galleys up the St. Lawrence for the rich copper lodes of the Michigan Indians, perhaps leaving their main dimension-traveling Disk with their operating capital in the [Money Pit](#) on Oak Island along the way? Minoan-Amerind trade might also explain the "feathered headress" (or Mohawk haircut) perhaps worn by one of the Phaistos glyphs, and others with the proper disregard for the laws of statistics have demonstrated the Phaistos Disk alphabet matches nicely (well, 20 per cent or so) with early Mayan script. As a perfect topper, in 1975 a fellow digging a house foundation in the Penobscot Valley of Maine uncovered what might be a single piece of Minoan movable type, admittedly depicting a different "snake goddess" figure from the one on the Disk.

"It had been found around the turn of the century, not at Knossos but in another Minoan palace at Phaistos. George told me that he was suspicious of the circumstances surrounding its discovery and he informed me that he was of the opinion that there may have been more than one disc found at Phaistos . . . the others had been taken off the island . . ."

-- Alan Butler, *The Bronze Age Computer Disc*

But if the Phaistos Disk is the central emblem, or magical device, of a cult of Minoan power spreading as far as Lake Huron, where are the rest of the disks? The goddess in Maine gives us our first clue; others appear on rock carvings deep in the Libyan Fezzan -- inscriptions in this Libyan script also resemble the Phaistos runes, and here also they surround emblems of a goddess or matriarch. The women carved on these rocks wear a distinctive pointed helmet

(rather like one appearing on the Disk), which also shows up in Greek depictions of the [Amazons](#). Who, of course, dwelt in Libya, and traveled to Anatolia, neatly bracketing Crete all the while. Anatolian goddesses bring us to our old friend Cybele, who appears on the Disk in one translation as the goddess of the Minoan labrys, or double-headed axe (which itself closely resembles the characteristic Minoan "oxhide" copper ingot). The net-wielding Amazons whom we've earlier identified as [spider-goddesses](#) from behind time (there's a neat eight-legged something-or-other on the Phaistos Disk, too) built their mighty empire from proto-Maya Calyferne to the Hittite hinterlands, powered by orichalcum energized by the Portal Disks of Phaistos. But something went wrong. Somewhere a disk slipped, or became corrupted. In Greek legend, Rhadamanthus and Minos became kings of Crete by killing the giant Asterius, possibly a masculinization of Astraea, the Queen of Heaven also known as Astarte -- or Cybele. Could this tale recall a primordial [reality quake](#) that hurled the Amazons out of space and time, secured only by the spiral spiderweb of glyphs on the Phaistos Disk? Are the other Disks still out there, at the bottom of the Money Pit, or locked away in the British Museum, or filed in Warehouse 23, all counting down the minutes until the stars come right, the year once more has 366 days, and Great Cybele strides forth to rule her world? Spin the Disk, and find out.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Designer's Notes: Transhuman Space

by David L. Pulver

My purpose in writing [Transhuman Space](#) was to break away from the prevailing medieval paradigms that dominated past science-fiction roleplaying games and create a modern, hard-science future setting. What are these paradigms? They should be familiar: one or more of them appear in most fantasy and science fiction games:

- that our ancestors (or ancient aliens) knew more than we do.
- that there will be a dark age, global war, or fall of civilization, often with billions of dead, before the new order is rebuilt on its ashes.
- that the future will be worse than the present.
- that changing the human body inevitably corrupts and destroys the mind or soul.
- that there will be one world government on Earth.
- that "machines" can't be the narrative equal to humans, and that humans as they exist today will continue to dominate Earth-descended society.
- that the laws of physics, as we understand them today, will be broken, in order to achieve fast space flight or star travel, psionics, or anti-gravity, and that this is easier and more likely than sapient machines, human genetic manipulation, or developments in psychology and social engineering.

The wave of cyberpunk RPGs at the end of the 1980s broke with some of these paradigms, but it only went halfway. I wanted to go all the way -- to create a roleplaying game that reflected the kind of science fiction I enjoyed, as written by authors like Ian Banks, Greg Bear, Greg Egan, Ken MacLeod, Linda Nagata, and Bruce Sterling, and inspired by non-fiction by the likes of Hans Moravec and Robert Zubrin.

In the spring of 2000, I proposed an idea for a worldbook called *Transhuman Space*, set in the year 2100, that detailed a future set after a century of uninterrupted technological advancement. The idea was that, thanks to cybernetics, biotechnology, and materials science (especially nanotechnology), we had left the cradle of Earth and created an interplanetary civilization. Borrowing concepts from the existing transhumanist movement, this setting would explore how nanotechnology, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence changed the definition of human in ways that created interesting story possibilities.

I sketched the outline of a future history and adventure setting, and sent it to Sean Punch. He read it, critiqued it, and helped me improve it. Then he passed it on to Alain Dawson (who was then managing editor) and Steve Jackson, and they agreed it had potential to support more than one book. With Sean's help, I drafted a line proposal for six books each of which would explore a part of the world of 2100. Three of the books, later named *Deep Beyond*, *High Frontier*, and *In the Well*, would explore the solar system; the other three, eventually called *Blue Shadow*, *Fifth Wave*, and *Broken Dreams*, would focus on aspects of Earth.

Things kicked into high gear. I had left my previous employer, Guardians of Order, and was now working full-time with SJ Games as a writer. My assignment was to turn *Transhuman Space* into a full-fledged line. Sean Punch and I established a detailed "story bible" for the setting, and we recruited other writers who joined a mailing list devoted to setting the project's basic parameters.

Jon F. Zeigler was one of the first to sign on, and agreed to take on the crucial task of writing *Fifth Wave*. He also helped Sean and I develop crucial background detail for the setting, especially its economic and political basis, and came up with many ideas that became pillars of the *Transhuman Space* background. Jonathan Woodward took on the task of writing *In the Well*, turning my sketchy notes on the Ares Plague terraformers and a China-dominated Mars into a living, breathing planet. Gene Seabolt's acerbic observations on human nature were a welcome antidote to utopianism, and John Snead contributed ideas for space colonization. The art side of the project began to shape up, with Phil Reed and Christopher Shy establishing the graphic design and visual look of the series. As for me, I had planned to write *Deep Beyond*, the book on the asteroid belt and outer system, but Steve Jackson felt that the setting

really needed a central core book that would serve as an introduction. Sean and I agreed. *Deep Beyond* was taken off the schedule, and replaced by a new book. It was called *Transhuman Space*.

Why "*Transhuman Space*?" The title reflects the two main elements of the setting. First, the idea that humans are poised between human and post-human. Many people are still recognizably human, but they share the world with people who are becoming more than human, and with created beings that never were. Second, there's the concept that a key part of our future lies beyond Earth, in the planets, moons, asteroids, and comets of the solar system, and ultimately in the stars beyond. It is this cusp between the human and the non-human, the earthly and the unearthly, that makes *Transhuman Space* a setting that people can relate to. It's even possible to play "yourself" -- thanks to advancing medical technology, people alive in 2002 can survive into the year 2100.

The first draft of *Transhuman Space* appeared on the *Pyramid* boards in the late spring of 2001. The playtesters, led by John Freiler and Kenneth Peters, did a wonderful job, and I'd like to thank everyone, especially those whose suggestions I took but whom space constraints prohibited me from crediting, and those who took the time to correspond with me outside the playtest, like Anthony Jackson, M.A. Lloyd, and the many members of the *Transhuman Space* mailing list (on Yahoo Groups). I didn't take everyone's advice, and sometimes I used their ideas in ways that probably drove them to distraction, but all the input and criticism helped make it a much better book.

The next couple of months saw myself, Sean Punch, and Andrew Hackard revise and edit the manuscript into shape, while Phil Reed and Christopher Shy worked on layout and art. At the same time, other books in the series -- *Fifth Wave*, *In the Well*, and *High Frontier* -- went into playtest. Many ideas that evolved during their writing and playtest made it into the core book, which had grown in size from 192 to 208 pages and become a "Powered by *GURPS*" release. It was originally intended as a full-color book, and Chris Shy produced beautiful painted illustrations for it, but printing problems forced us to put those plans on hold. Instead, the book appeared in at the end of January 2001 as a black-and-white softcover -- but \$10 cheaper. However, a full-color hardback edition will appear later this year.

Mutable Point Totals

A section in *Transhuman Space* that got misplaced on the way to publication was the guidelines for Mutable Point Totals. Here they are again . . .

One way of playing *Transhuman Space* is to treat character points as an administrative record-keeping score, rather than a means of rewarding character advancement. Whenever a character does something that would cost points, like an infomorph character buying an extra body, simply increase his point total to cover it. Whenever something happens that would cost him points, like losing an Ally, decrease his point total. Here's an example:

Tanith Tokamura Hecate starts out as a 200-point character. She's a Tennin parahuman, who works for a "vacuum cleaner" orbital salvage operation, while moonlighting as bounty hunter. Tanith has two Allies (Programmable): Jim, a wearable interface with an NAI infomorph companion, and Bob, an LAI residing in a tech spider cybershell. She also has a partner, Grimalkin -- a free Felicia bioroid -- who is another PC, not an Ally.

In Tanith and Grimalkin's first adventure, a troubleshooting expedition to a secret research station turns nasty, and Tanith's tech spider is eaten by devourer cyberswarms! Medical bills for the team's other injuries (Tanith is badly injured by nanoburn gas) use up the rest of their resources, and Tanith cannot afford to replace her tech spider. She earned 2 points of experience, but lost a 10-point Ally [Programmed]; she's now a 192-point character!

In Tanith's second adventure, she and Grimalkin rescue a kidnapped slinky idol from Martian Triad xoxnappers and earns a \$15,000 reward. Tanith spends some of it to buy a Guardians perm nanomod (3 points). She also earns 4 character points worth of experience, which she puts toward skills. Tanith is now a 199-point character.

In the group's third adventure, they continue their bounty hunting, tracking down Jill the Ripper, a rogue cyberdoll sexworker possessed by the shadow of notorious serial killer. They capture it, but Tanith loses her right hand to the cyberdoll's razor-sharp katana! She now has the One Hand [-10] disadvantage, but the GM awards her 4 character points, bringing her to 193 points. Tanith also retrieves the disabled cyberdoll, planning to repair it eventually -- if she

does, it might become a new Ally, but until then it's deactivated, and not worth any points.

In Tanith's fourth adventure, she's on Luna, hanging around the Moonshadow spa waiting for her new arm to grow, while Grimalkin prowls the bars. However, the GM decides to make things interesting. In the spa, Tanith runs into a tall, dark, and handsome stranger who turns out to be an amortality assassin. Tanith discovers and foils the assassin's plot (one-handed!), and the GM awards her 5 character points. She also gets her hand replaced, eliminating the One Hand disadvantage [-10]. This adventure has seen a net gain of 15 points; she's now a 208-point character.

In the party's fifth adventure, Tanith and Grimalkin go to L5 to salvage a nuclear reactor from an abandoned plague-struck space habitat. Unfortunately, it's not abandoned: they discover a nest of Maple Syndicate data pirates. In the ensuing firefight, Tanith is shot dead. Grimalkin rushes Tanith's corpse to hospital and arranges for it to be quickly placed into nanostasis, then brainpeeled. The operation succeeds, and Tanith's now a ghost.

Grimalkin can't afford a new body for Tanith, but she remembers the cyberdoll they captured back in the third adventure, and has it repaired. Tanith wakes up in that body. It's worth 146 more points than her old one! When added to the 1 character point she earned during the adventure, she's now a 355-point character. But she's no longer human . . .

If the "Mutable Character Points" option is used, point totals are still used to determine how powerful a starting character is. (To prevent "gameplaying" during character creation, the GM may wish to rule starting wealth must all be mostly spent before the first adventure begins, and can't go to anything that would cost points.)

Conclusion: In a Perfect World, You May Be Obsolete

Okay; this should be the last word for now on my 977,244 part series about the dichotomy between Simulationist and Romantic gaming, with a conclusion I reached.

But first, I wanted to make some observations. I note with astonishment that the roleplaying hobby, although not even three decades old, has evolved considerably over that time. RPGs began as an outshoot of wargaming, complete with miniatures, dice, paper, and pencil.

Today, many folks play games without minis at all. Diceless roleplaying has a dedicated following. And many people play without paper or pencil . . . or even without being in the same room as the rest of the players! Yet I think folks would recognize any of these variants as "roleplaying."

Now, following this logic, I'll see what I can devise.

Simulationist

At one point in the ancient computer adventure game *Zork III*, there's a puzzle where you need to get past a dark area across a large lake (swimming across the lake would extinguish the torches and lanterns you would need to navigate the dark area). The actual solution involved using a teleportation table to move an object from *Zork II* to *Zork III* (really!). But in an early version of the game it was possible to find a light source and transport it in a waterproof chest across the lake . . . even though the programmers didn't originally intend for that as a solution. Why? Because the chest was defined with certain attributes (holds X amount of stuff; can open and close; when closed, doesn't leak water; etc.), and so was the lantern (lights up dark areas, has a certain size, cannot get wet, and so on). Thus, within the rules of the simulation it was possible to come to a different solution.

Likewise, the *Ultima* computer games (especially parts *VI* and *VII*) started by fabricating a game world system -- complete with its own rules and mechanics -- and *then* tailoring a storyline, game, and plot around it.

It seems to me, then, that an ultimate theoretical Simulationist game would take the game and rule system, and remove the GM from it entirely (or almost entirely). In that way it would be possible to have an ultimate, impartial game. (One of my first observations about *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition* is that it seemed much more rigidly codified than previous versions, and would be perhaps ideal for a computer treatment. Furthermore, I've noticed that most *D&D adventures* have become much more codified; they will frequently describe all reasonable objects in a room, their properties, how much it would take to damage them, whether they're waterproof and can be taken across a lake, etc.)

Of course, such a system would require an incredible degree of freedom for the players; practically all possible reasonable options would need to be available . . . otherwise it would resemble the often-unsatisfying computer "roleplaying" games. (Perhaps a GM could be available to do "override" control for unplanned actions.)

Now, the computer-savvy would point out that this vision sounds not unlike popular online games, like *Ultima Online* or *Everquest*. And the economically savvy might realize that more people have probably played these online games -- and generated more money for their companies -- than probably any pencil-and-paper RPG ever. The difference is currently mostly a matter of scope -- traditional roleplaying involves less than 10 players, not more than 10,000 -- control (your actions are usually limited to "smite" in most online settings) and immersion; no matter how much one "chats" in a game like *Everquest*, it can be difficult to *really* feel like you're your character, and not a puppeteer.

So let's consider the Extreme Simulationist RPG. It could be a computer (or computer-assisted) game. Play would be as normal, but the computer would be able to track the game state. (Some logically interesting and efficient input device would be necessary here; it would be boring to type in "North 10 feet" over and over . . .) The party would be given a goal or goals, a setting, and free rein to pursue their goals. The computer would adjudicate as much as it could. What if a situation arose that couldn't be arbitrated by the computer? Well, maybe one of the players could be chosen

(either at random or in rotation) to try to solve the problem. If that doesn't work, it could be taken up by *all* the players. As a last resort it might be decided that the player simply can't do that. Ideally, though, the Simulation would be accurate enough that this wouldn't arise much.

Of course, computers aren't anywhere near this level of sophistication currently, but 30 years ago they weren't even powerful, small, and common enough to roll dice. Who knows where they'll be in another 30 years of the hobby?

The upshot of this Ultimate Simulationist RPG is that *no one* would be required to be the GM . . . meaning that everyone can have the fun of playing as a group.

Romantic

Over the past decades, many games have drifted towards a more Romantic vision over the past decade or so; "story-heavy" settings and campaigns seem to be of utmost concern to a wide -- and vocal -- percentage of gamers.

Of course, these games also still tend to have GMs . . . with some exceptions (odd games like *Baron Munchausen* or *Once Upon a Time*, or [Yes or No Adventures](#)). But with *all* roleplaying games I've always believed one thing: it's ultimately about the roleplayers. If you leave a football game and all you can remember is the referees, it wasn't a very good football game. Likewise, if I run a gaming session and the only things I or my players can remember are my wacky NPCs, my plot twists, or the out-of-game banter, then it wasn't a very good game. In my mind, the GM is primarily there to facilitate the actions of the players.

Some games take this even further. It's entirely possible to play, say, a *Vampire: The Masquerade* with almost *no* direct action by the GM . . . players can devise their own plots against each other, interact with themselves, and tell grand ol' stories. Taking this even further, many Live Action games don't have *any* GM involvement.

Of course, in this type of setting, players probably require some means of introducing their own story elements. Many games include elements of this already, either small (*Masterbook* players have the ability to suddenly find new contacts, clues, or other minor details, depending on the cards they draw), or large (*DC Heroes* has an entire section detailing how players can submit their own subplots to the GM).

If one presumes the ultimate theoretical Romantic RPG as an opportunity to tell stories, then a GM may not even be necessary *at all*. At its core, the Romantic movement seems to be like the "Cops & Robbers" game we're so fond of using as an example for those unfamiliar. Why are we running around firing finger-guns at each other and breaking or enforcing the law? To tell our own stories; we don't necessarily need a mediator for *that*.

What *is* required for a Romantic game, then, and still have it resemble a roleplaying game?

Well, it probably needs a setting; this is what is required to keep the heroes from wandering "off the map." This could be as narrow as an elevator, or as broad as "A Super-Heroic Earth."

It probably needs a story . . . loosely defined. After all, if the players are making up their own story, they don't need too much narrative pull. But they probably need *something* to keep the story moving; a loose story that can progress if there's nothing else going on.

So let's take a simple example. Everyone is in a small keep along a hostile border. It's a stormy night, and travel outside the safety of the walls would be highly dangerous. The players all have access to a map of the keep, and each player is given a stack of the NPCs there. Each NPC might be structured enough that players wouldn't learn more than necessary, perhaps in a booklet:

Almerk the Shopkeep

Personality: Brash, honest, talkative, doesn't haggle

Desires: Lonely, hoping to retire early, secretly wants to learn to play the lute and write an epic ballad

Details:

- Inventory available to buy (p. 2)
- Rumors (p. 3)
- Secrets and plot elements (p. 4)
- . . .

Page 4 might look like this:

Secrets And Plot Elements:

- Almerk knows that **Triss** wants to leave the Keep, and would be willing to do almost anything to accomplish her goal. (Secrecy: Low)
- Almerk knows that **Fensmoore** is plotting to assassinate **Nobleman Justone** within a week. He is afraid of Fensmoore, but will reveal the information if he believes those he tells can help the Nobleman (to whom he is loyal). (Secrecy: Medium)
- Almerk knows that the **Nobleman Justone** does not have a legitimate heir, as do many . . . he also knows *why*: the result of a hunting accident he was witness to 20 years earlier. (Secrecy: High)

(and so on)

In this way the player in control of the NPC would be able to use as much or as little of the information needed to keep the game going.

Perhaps a deck of ordered cards could determine what happens when; all the players decide when time has passed and the next card is flipped. (Thus the top card might be: "10:30 PM: The weather gets worse. / Those near the stables notice the animals are getting spooked. / Those near the west tower hear a scream. / Those near the barracks notice **Fensmoore** talking with the General **Ashton**.") When everyone agrees a half hour has passed, the 11:00 PM card is flipped.

Everyone can pursue their own goals, or pursue their *NPC's* goals, as they desire . . . and an interesting and complex story would (ideally) emerge. Think of something like the *How To Host A Murder* series, with even *more* freedom and interaction.

The upshot of this Ultimate Romantic RPG is that *no one* would be required to be the GM . . . meaning that everyone can have the fun of playing as a group.

Conclusion

In my mind, roleplaying as we think of it is most limited by the lack of good gamemasters out there. A *lot* of effort has been spent trying to make better GMs (including much effort in this humble ol' mag); in my mind the future may well lie with making the need for good GMs less necessary. (Some effort has already been made in this regard, with games like *Rune*.)

Perhaps more interestingly -- or depressing, if you're of that mindset -- roleplaying games are by their nature very transient; if you run the most incredible storyline ever, only your players are going to experience it. (Because, really, most campaigns are pretty boring to those who aren't playing it . . . insert "Don't tell me about your character" joke here.) Of course, the ethereal nature of roleplaying sessions is part of what makes them special. But I know I'd personally *love* to experience sometime like a Simulationist RPG scenario designed by Sid Meier (imagine *Pirates!* with roleplaying), or a Stephen King Romantic horror adventure. A system that would allow some (or all) of the burden to be taken off the GM -- and more on the scenario/world creator -- could theoretically allow a *much* wider audience to experience an adventure than before. (I've seen this to a certain extent with LARP games at conventions, where the same scenario is often run multiple times; I have been able to talk to people that experienced other sessions about their experiences and compare them to mine, while still having a unique experience myself.) This de-emphasis on the GM -- like the de-emphasis on miniatures, dice, rules, and pencil and paper before -- may ultimately allow more fun, greater flexibility, and wider appeal for the hobby . . . while keeping the essential element that we know and

love in roleplaying.

Namely, roleplaying.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Ghost Tower of Inverness**, p. 16.*

(Four stars)

"There is a river ahead of you. A little boy sits at the edge of the river. He looks very sad.

"What does the little boy look like?

"What do you say to the little boy?

"After everyone has had a chance to add details to the story, the little boy speaks to the Trainers."

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Homestead Inc.

A Corporate Player for any Space Campaign

by C. A. Johnson

Homestead Incorporated is a multi-planetary corporation specializing in the exploitation and colonization of habitable worlds. They fund, equip, recruit for, and organize any sort of colonizing venture, be it a search for a new home, or the creation of a new mining operation for capital gain. Their expert administrators and workers diligently provide the best service possible . . .for those that have the credit.

This interstellar giant holds title to several worlds, and has developed nearly a hundred more. It began its rise to power as a bank, making loans to construction firms and other corporate ventures. During a financial crush, the bank foreclosed on two very powerful firms. One was a heavy construction company. The other was a startup Aerospace firm. Suddenly the bank found itself the owner of several hundred million credits worth of construction gear and heavy manufacturing equipment. Rather than sell it, then C.E.O. and legendary founder of Homestead Inc. Syril Traygan chose to keep the two businesses.

Shortly after that, FTL propulsion was released to the corporate sector. A compact FTL drive suitable for unmanned exploration became an expensive but real possibility. Syril Traygan took another gamble, and threw millions of credits into building several unmanned probe craft, which he launched without fanfare toward stars now merely years distant instead of centuries. Unlike other probes of their kind, these had no scientific agenda to meet, and no government priorities to hold them. They visited their assigned systems, surveyed them roughly and quickly, and moved on, sending an FTL "message pod" back to its parent company. It was a risky plan, but it paid off. The first two systems found drew worlds that appeared habitable. Again, rather than trumpet his discoveries, Traygan began assembling his dream . . .a colonizing ship. A project this size was impossible to conceal, but Traygan did everything to play down the significance, calling it "a simple mining expedition."

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Homestead Inc.

A Corporate Player for any Space Campaign

by C. A. Johnson

Homestead Incorporated is a multi-planetary corporation specializing in the exploitation and colonization of habitable worlds. They fund, equip, recruit for, and organize any sort of colonizing venture, be it a search for a new home, or the creation of a new mining operation for capital gain. Their expert administrators and workers diligently provide the best service possible . . .for those that have the credit.

This interstellar giant holds title to several worlds, and has developed nearly a hundred more. It began its rise to power as a bank, making loans to construction firms and other corporate ventures. During a financial crush, the bank foreclosed on two very powerful firms. One was a heavy construction company. The other was a startup Aerospace firm. Suddenly the bank found itself the owner of several hundred million credits worth of construction gear and heavy manufacturing equipment. Rather than sell it, then C.E.O. and legendary founder of Homestead Inc. Syril Traygan chose to keep the two businesses.

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by **P.D. Magnus**

Kill Doctor Lucky comes with just a board and a pile of cards. One doesn't expect counters from a Cheapass Game, but some of the atmosphere is lost when the statuette of the Berlin Bear wanders the house chased by refugees from Parcheesi. The solution is this cast of would-be murderers and one would-be victim. They are provided in PDF format ([Click here to download!](#)), so you can print out hordes of them at your pleasure.

These figures invite introduction into other games, too. Dropping them into a session of *GURPS How To Host a Murder Mystery* is obvious enough, but let's not stop there -- the PC's in your next *Call of Cthulhu* game can be made to fear the squad of Little Rhodas that steps off the phantom school bus!

Cardboard Anti-Heroes



Dramatis Personae

- **Agnes Lucky:** Dr. Lucky's sister. The Doctor ruined her chances with the only man she ever loved. Plus, he still refuses to admit that she is the better snooker player.
- **Derek Lucky:** Dr. Lucky's nephew. He is a money-grubbing ne'erdoowell, of course, and he is convinced that he stands to inherit a great fortune. His plans for the money include fine wine and expensive women -- and at least the wine won't turn him down.
- **Emma Hunt:** Dr. Lucky's niece. She has something of a homicidal streak, and she also hopes to inherit enough money to pay off the debt owed by her boyfriend Doyle.
- **Della Hunt:** Emma's boyfriend Doyle. After swindling half of the East End, Doyle is on the run from the law. He told Emma that he was on the run from loansharks, and she was very understanding. She suggested they travel to the country. To avoid suspicion, he's posing as her sister Della. Everything was going well until Dr. Lucky saw through his disguise. Now Doyle has to kill the old man before the geezer has a chance to go to the authorities.
- **Little Rhoda:** The daughter of Dr. Lucky's former mistress. Her ailing mother planned to come tonight and kill Dr. Lucky, but she is confined to bed. Rhoda has come in her place and plans to make her mama proud.
- **Colonel Eberhardt:** Dr. Lucky's bunk-mate in his army days. The Colonel has been portly and bald ever since the Doctor abandoned him to die in the Congo. That was many years ago, but now it is time for payback.
- **James:** The butler. He had a last name once, but no one has called him by it in a decade. He wants to bring his interminable service at this unspeakable estate to an end, but he can't leave until Dr. Lucky does. And the only way Dr. Lucky is leaving is in a bag.
- **Alexis Lucky:** Beautiful but treacherous. Perhaps she is some relation to Dr. J. Robert Lucky, in line to inherit

millions. Perhaps the last name is just a coincidence and she will kill him just to watch him die.

The Bonus Weapons Variant

In this variant, each character gets a bonus with the one or two weapons that they are depicted carrying. They get a bonus of +1 when they attack with one of those weapons, and any Failure cards they play are worth +1 to stop attacks with one of those weapons by other players.

If you play with only one bonus weapon each, use the first of the two listed here.

- **Agnes:** Billiard Cue (Revolver)
- **Derek:** Civil War Cannon (Loud Noise)
- **Emma:** Piece of Rope (Silken Cord)
- **Della:** Chain Saw (Monkey Paw)
- **Rhoda:** Big Red Hammer (Silken Cord)
- **The Colonel:** Trowel (Shoe Horn)
- **James:** Rat Poison (Bad Cream)
- **Alexis:** Sharp Knife (Letter Opener)

Pyramid Pick

Godlike -- Superhero Roleplaying in a World on Fire, 1936-1946

Published by [Hobgoblynn Press](#)

Produced by [Pagan Publishing](#)

Written by **Dennis Detwiler & Greg Stolze**

354-page hardbound book; \$39.95

The release of *Godlike* marks not only the completion of the quartet of World War II-themed RPGs announced for 2001 -- the sixtieth anniversary of America's entry into the war, but also the advent of the very first RPG from Pagan Publishing. Best known for their superb range of *Call of Cthulhu* campaign books, devotees of Chaosium's classic RPG have come to expect something special with each new Pagan book. So just on reputation alone can we expect that something special in *Godlike*?

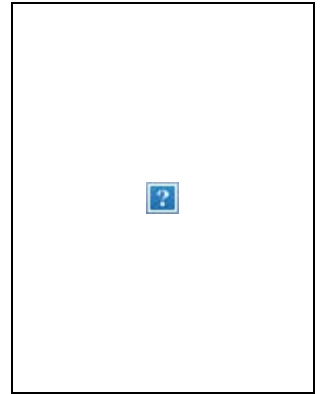
Of the first three World War II RPGs, only *GURPS World War II* took a straight view upon the history, whereas the other two combined the history with another genre -- World War II and mecha in DP9's *Gear Krieg*, and pulp horror with World War II in Pinnacle's *d20* setting and supplement *Weird War II: Blood on the Rhine*. With *Godlike*, the combination of genres is that of superheroes with World War II, which must make this game the first superhero-World War II RPG. Previous takes on this genre combination -- *All This and World War II* for TSR's original Marvel Superheroes, *Glory Days* for *Brave New World*, and the *JSA Sourcebook* for *DC Universe* have tended towards the four-color style. Not so with *Godlike*. All characters are normal people first, and potential heroes second. In *Godlike*, characters may be blessed with extraordinary abilities, but a bullet can kill in most circumstances -- in this game it pays to duck and cover!

The first Talent (as super-powered individuals are called) was Der Flieger -- the "Airman" who landed at the opening of the Berlin Games to light the Olympic torch. Hitler reveled in the existence of the first *Urbemensch* and for years would deny that any other nation or race could also possess men with special abilities. Der Flieger could fly faster than the sound barrier and whatever the altitude did not suffer from either lack of air, the cold, or wind resistance. Later in the war, his sonic boom would down the Polish air force and some fifty allied aircraft before proximity fused anti-aircraft rounds killed him in 1944.

Events leading up to the war and throughout placed individuals under enormous stress, which was often enough for them to manifest their own ability or Talent. For example, Jumping Johnny, the first English Talent, was with the British Expeditionary force at Dunkirk. In his desire to escape, he leapt the English Channel -- some twenty-seven miles. A side effect was the explosive effect of his landing, from which the Talent was himself immune. Used as a scout throughout the war, this flaw would be his undoing when he landed in a German ammunition dump.

Although *Godlike* combines World War II with superheroes, it plays straight with history. The effect of Talents upon history is minimal -- for example, a possible precognitive dream had the USS *Arizona* under sail and at battle stations at 7 am on the morning of December 7th, 1941 and it was the *Oklahoma* that was sent to a watery grave. The major changes would come after the war when the "mad" Talent god Lord Yama forced the creation of the Realm of Assam in Northeast India and the foundation of a tribal homeland for the Kachin people split Burma in two.

During the war as more and more Talents appeared, they were pressed into military service. The Allies assigned them



to the most suitable service, but in the European theater most would be sent to the British commando school in Scotland, trained to be soldiers first, then Talents, before being assigned to a Talent Operation Group (TOG) which would be attached to a US infantry division. There they would serve as scouts, shock troops and the like, specially trained to fight Axis Talents, who were usually inducted into the SS. This is the default setting for *Godlike*, spearheading the invasion into occupied Europe -- after all, the motto of the TOG is "We Go First."

Character design in *Godlike* is relatively easy, but with each player working with the GM to build a character to fit an agreed concept. The process involves first creating an ordinary character, before going onto designing and purchasing the Talent powers. Characters have six attributes -- Body, Co-ordination, Brains, Command, Cool, and Sense. These are rated from one to five, with two being the human norm. In the game they start at one and players have a further six points to assign to them. Then twenty points are spent on skills, though no skill can be bought above the attribute it is keyed to. If the default TOG setting is to be used, characters also receive a package of skills to reflect their further training.

Although the setting is the work of Dennis Detwiller, the mechanics are the brainchild of Greg Stoltze. They use a "stat+ skill" dice pool system that is dissimilar to the one you might have seen in either *Vampire: The Masquerade* or *Legend of the Five Rings*. Ten-sided dice are rolled equal to the dice pool, which cannot be greater than ten dice. The aim of this is to obtain matches. Roll two or more matches, and you succeed, but each matching set can be defined by its height and width. High or tall matching sets have high numbers on their rolls -- say a pair of eights and above. A wide set contains a large number of matching sets, say four 3's. This is expressed as a shorthand: width x height. Roll 6d and get 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 10 -- this would be a tall and narrow result or 2 x 10. Roll 1, 4, 4, 4, 4, and 6 -- would be a wide, short result or 4 x 3. Both height and width are important -- height determines the degree of success, width how quickly you get the job done.

The rest of the rules in *Godlike* are essentially slight permutations on how the "width x height" rolls are interpreted. For example, in combat, all those involved make just a single roll -- width of which determines initiative and the height where you hit. Combat itself involves both shock and killing damage and is geared towards forcing the players to think about their actions, rather than attempting to stand there and take the damage. The rules cover just about every eventuality on the battlefield -- aimed and spray fire, grenades, flamethrowers, and dealing with armored vehicles. Up until this point *Godlike* could just be used to run a solid, gritty World War II game, but that would be missing the point of this RPG.

That would be the Para-humans known as Talents. Scientists cannot quite understand how these work, only that they can somehow warp reality with their mind. If their will is weak -- lost through shock, mental illness, and direct will contests -- their Talents may not work. Will-to-will contests usually come about as the result of a Talent facing another Talent. One Talent can detect the presence of another and can even attempt to prevent the use of an opponent's own Talent ability if he so decides. In the default high realism campaign, each character receives twenty-five points of Will with which to purchase their Talents. Alternatively, larger-than-life characters can be created on thirty to forty-five points for a cinematic adventure style game or a four-color character can be created with up to a hundred points.

Talents can be designed, or alternatively one of the ready-to-run 25-point packages can be bought. Talents come in the form of Hyperstats and Hyperskills (these two allow you to push both skills and statistics above the human maximum of five) and Miracles. These are the true superpowers in *Godlike*, but are limited in that some traditional powers of the genre do not exist in this universe. This includes definitive precognition, mind control, absorption and creation of powers, true telepathy or mind reading, time travel or Superscience. Goldberg science does exist, but the futuristic devices created using the Goldberg Talent do not work outside of the creator's vision. Most Talents listed are generic, to which the player adds the descriptive details. One Talent that is peculiar to *Godlike* is the Zed -- which enables a Talent to temporarily negate another's powers.

Players use their free Will points to buy dice in their desired talents. These can be ordinary dice, hard dice or wiggle dice (no laughing at the back there . . .), each more expensive per die. When a Talent dice pool is rolled, any hard or wiggle dice are kept aside and compared with the roll made. Hard dice are always ten, so it is usually good to buy a minimum of two, so rolls always succeed (and succeed well). Wiggle dice are better than hard dice because they can be changed to any number to get matches with those rolled and determine the degree of success desired.

With each Talent, a cost is given for each type of dice. These costs can be increased by making a Talent more powerful, versatile or reliable, and decreased by giving it flaws. For example, Gladiatrix, the bodyguard of General de Gaulle, has the Talent miracle of "Block" and can parry bullets fired at her. Block has the qualities of Defends and Robust. If she wanted to be able to deflect those bullets back at the source, the Attacks quality would be added, increasing the cost. The overall cost is reduced because Gladiatrix can only use her Talent with her father's sword -- it has a unique focus. While the arithmetic involved in this process is far from difficult, some practice will certainly be needed before either player or GM will be happy with the process. Examining the many examples throughout the book will help. The complexity lies somewhere between *Nexus: the Infinite City* and *GURPS Supers*.

The *Godlike* rulebook is itself a sturdy hardback, the contents printed on good quality paper. Although the illustrations are sparse, they are a mixture of photographs, doctored photographs -- to show for example a flyer alongside a trio of ME-109 fighters, and original art. The writing is not without the occasional much dreaded "refer to page xx," and while irritating they are not insurmountable as *Godlike* comes with a good contents page and reasonable (but not perfect) index.

For the *Godlike* GM, there is plenty of support including a detailed history from 1936 to 1946. This closely adheres to our own history, but clearly marks those entries that describe Talent involvement in an event. There are dossiers of over sixty Talents from across the world, although only the first ten listed are given full game statistics. Many of these break the 25 point high realism limit, with one or two -- including Der Flieger -- costing as much as 150 points. Additionally a full TOG unit is described and written up ready to play. Comprised of a first lieutenant, a sergeant and a squad of seven, all of these Talents are built on the 25-point limit. It is suggested that initially both officer and NCO are kept as NPCs, with the players selecting from the enlisted men, each playing multiple characters in what *Godlike* calls "Troop Play," essentially this being the same as Troupe Play, pioneered in *Ars Magica*. Members of this TOG are all American, which in the main rulebook constitutes the default nationality, further supported by background material upon the USA. But given the full field manual of equipment (though I would gripe at the lack of the Bren gun from the description of British equipment), and some research a GM will be able to run a game in any desired theater of World War II.

The first two appendices at the back of *Godlike* provide optional rules and statistics for the first ten Talents. In the third appendix, Mike Mearls gives us thirty pages of "Open Source Superhero Rules" for those that want to run *Godlike* using the *d20* system or as he puts it "that game." Although the core *d20* mechanics are used, these rules give a completely different method of character generation to the one seen in the three core books. Character creation is by design, with the starting stats of eleven (exceeding normal humans' average) and no feats. There are no classes, and characters receive forty points to spend on skills, with combat skills being very expensive. As in the *Godlike* rules, the style of campaign desired -- here given as gritty, low-powered, moderate-powered, high-powered, and super-powered -- determines the points to be spent on hyperstats, hyperskills, and miracles, as well as feats and save modifiers. The game system is the same one we know and love, being linear as opposed to *Godlike*'s dice pool mechanics. Using these rules will give a *Godlike* game a very different feel, one that is slightly more heroic in style. Certainly this appendix does offer the *d20* devotee a far more comprehensive set of rules with which to explore the superhero genre than we have seen to date.

In addition to the gritty feel of *Godlike*, the tone of the writing gets across a sense of desperation inherent in the setting. The Second World War was a time of desperation, with both sides fighting to save what they felt was important. Talents were pressed into service more so than the ordinary man, but to paraphrase the back cover of the *Godlike* rulebook, "Talents are larger than life. But the war is larger than any one Talent." In battle, Talents can make the tactical and occasionally the strategic difference between victory and defeat, yet in the grand scheme of things, it is still men, logistics, and planning that make the real difference and win the war. To a Talent, their power not only separates them from ordinary men, it also puts them on a pedestal. They are expected to live up to higher expectations -- be braver, more resourceful, and above all, have the same faith in themselves as others do. To a Talent, defeat is very much a state of mind and loss of faith can mean loss of the very ability that sets them apart from the norm.

Only one thing is really missing from *Godlike*, and that is a scenario. Suggestions are given, but for an actual adventure one should turn to "Glazier," a ready-to-play scenario that can be found on the *Godlike* website (<http://www.godlikerpg.com>). Also available on the site are the basic rules so that Glazier can be run, plus additional

resources. Hobgoblynn Press plan to detail other participants in the war in a range of supplements, including the Germans in *G-1: Will To Power*, and the British and Americans in *G-2: The Reality of the Impossible*. Further, they have the future of the future of the Godlike universe mapped out during the Cold War with *Ghosts: Superhero Roleplaying in a World on the Brink 1947-1975* and an examination of a Talent school in *Teenagers+: Superhero Roleplaying at the Toliver School for the Ethical Use of Parahuman Powers 1984-1988*. Before either of these RPGs is released, GMs can map out the future of their *Godlike* campaigns with *Wild Talents: Superhero Roleplaying in a World Gone Mad*.

For their first RPG, Pagan Publishing have given us a solid game that succeeds in exploring the author's question -- "What would a world be like if there were super humans?" In *Godlike*, the answer would be "only slightly different," but it is enough to mark this game as not only an excellent World War II RPG, but an excellent superhero game as well. Additionally, Greg Stoltze's mechanics have a great feel to them, being fast and effective -- just right for the game's gritty tone. For gamers looking for a different take on the genre, *Godlike* should light their imagination.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Dogs o' War: All's Fair (for The Great Rail Wars)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by John R. Hopley and Shane Lacy Hensley

64 pages; \$15.00

Dogs o' War: All's Fair, by John Hopley and Shane Hensley, is Pinnacle Entertainment Group's long-awaited return to their *Great Rail Wars* miniature battles game. The supplement updates the timeline to the year 1878, following the setting-changing events of the *Deadlands* role playing game's recent adventure trilogy. More importantly for the players of *The Great Rail Wars*, however, is the updating of the Rail Barons' progress, the addition of new units and heroes for each of the railroads, including a handful previously scattered throughout other books, and the entrance of a new faction: the City of Lost Angels. Most of the new units detailed in this supplement have attractive corresponding miniatures available from Pinnacle Entertainment Group. Finally, *Dogs o' War* includes a short campaign, with briefings for each of the factions. While the book is physically thin for the \$15 price tag, it is densely packed and a welcome return to an exceptionally fun game.

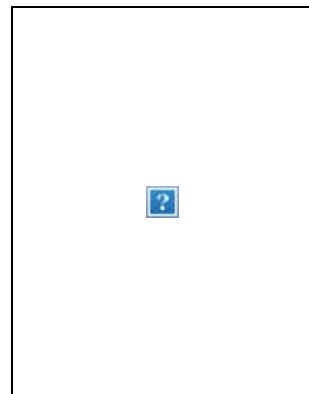
[SPOILER ALERT!]

Even longtime players of *The Great Rail Wars* will be surprised at some of the twists and turns the Great Rail Wars have taken. The coming of the cease-fire in the east, brought on by the deaths of Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee (detailed in the *Dead Presidents* adventure) and the coming of the Cold War, Union and Confederate troops have shifted west. Likewise, the events that forged the Black Circle (detailed in the sourcebook of the same name) have produced an uneasy cease-fire between the Black River and Union Blue. A tunnel collapse (sealing up Tombstone Epitaph reporter Lacy O' Malley along with the workers) and an aggressive stance by the Denver Pacific (owned by Smith and Robartes) have apparently knocked Hellstrome's Wasatch out of the race, although some believe he is simply readying a new plan. Iron Dragon, having reached Seattle, purchased the Great Northwestern under tense circumstances. Finally, both Dixie Rails and Bayou Vermillion have come closer to the City of Lost Angels, although both are wary of Santa Ana's Army of the Dead and the new resistance of Reverend Grimme's forces - including the Avenging Angels, Bloody Ones, and Faminites.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

In addition to advancing in space, the Rail Barons have developed several new units. Some of these, like the Veteran Artillery units of Union Blue and Dixie Rails, are natural enough developments. Likewise, several long-awaited (and long-expected) units -- like the Black River's Coven of Witches and Iron Dragon Sorcerers -- appear. Several new Heroes, including Doc Holiday, Wyatt Earp, and Violet Esperanza, are found here. In several cases, these units and heroes have new advantages, disadvantages, and gizmos. In doing so, *Dogs o' War* addresses one of the small problems of the game -- the strong similarity between Union Blue and Dixie Rails. Likewise, several of the gaps found in each army have been interestingly and appropriately filled.

"Payback!", the mini-campaign included with the supplement, is a short, playable series of encounters. It includes specific briefings for all of the factions, old and new, and is a good introduction to the Lost Angels faction. The authors recommend that players run "The Many Tasks of Grimme" scenario, found in *A Fist Full of Ghost Rock*. In addition, those with access to the unpublished but once-downloadable *Raid on Roswell* will likely want to play this campaign first as well (There is some indication that this will be re-released by Pinnacle at some point in the future). The campaign is short enough to be played in a single afternoon by those familiar with the rules of the game.



There are some things that would have made this supplement even stronger. A workable experience or hero creation system would add to the game and add some weight to a thin 64 pages. Due to flaws in the original system that allowed for abuses, *The Great Rail Wars* has been without a workable system for creating heroes and experienced units. *Dogs o' War* does offer something close, in providing new heroes and some veteran units, but the freedom to create such units would add a lot to players' options.

Along with the release of *Dogs o' War*, Pinnacle has released several new miniatures. Bayou Vermillion now has a very attractive Hougan, usable for both this game and any other needing a Voodoo priest while Dixie Rails and Union Blue now has a solidly sculpted leader figure in the USA/CSA Officer. The bulk of the figures, of course, have gone to Lost Angels, and include the Avenging Angel, the Hunger Spirit, and posses of Guardian Angels and Faminites. All of these are of high quality with a good feel of motion. The Hunger Spirit, a fairly large figure, requires some assembly. (These blisters are available at the Pinnacle Entertainment Group web site.) All can also be used with any version of the Deadlands role playing game.

All in all, *Dogs o' War* is a good buy. In terms of size, the book is a little thin for \$15 but the 64 pages are packed with good material.

--*Matthew M. DeForrest*

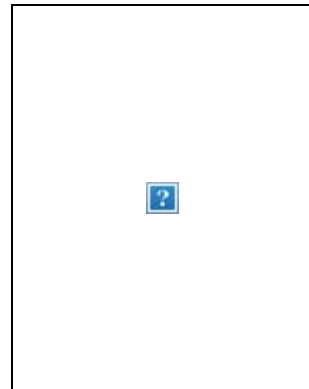
Pyramid Pick

Gaming Frontiers (for d20)

Published by [United Playtest Inc.](#)

Edited by Robert J. Williams

140 full-color pages; \$17.95



Gaming Frontiers is a bit different than the standard magazine. Many are thinking, at \$17.95, it better be. Well, it's not really a magazine, but more like the Rifter from Palladium. This is a sourcebook not for one genre or setting, but for all things *d20*. But what's inside? Reading the back cover of Gaming Frontiers is like reading a who's who not only of the *d20* system, but some of the founding fathers of the original Dungeons & Dragons game. Not only do you have well known *d20* publishers like Green Ronin, Privateer Press, and Atlas Games, but also there are web-based companies like Oone Roleplaying Games and Bard's Productions.

Each of these companies has contributed something a little special to the first issue. Are you looking for prestige classes? Check out the Skval, a Norse Warrior with an affinity for water, or the Ehtzara, a unique Prestige Class from *Arcanis* campaign setting.

Those looking for monsters, get a sneak peak at Minions with four creatures in full color, as well as a section of Norse Specters, a hint of what's to come in the Codex Germania. Of course, dinosaurs might be more your style, and with the sneak peak at *Dinosaur Planet: Broncosaurus Rex*, we get to see five different dinosaurs at various sizes to throw into the *d20* mix.

Some might be looking for more adventures. For them there are "The Tomb of Obrosh," an adventure for 8th-10th level characters from Skeleton Key Games, "The Grande Temple of Jing" by Hammerdog Games for 4th-6th level characters, and "The Veiled Threat" by Guildhouse Games for a 5th level party.

If magic items are your preferred currency, the Treasure Chest has a section titled "Incoming" from Thunderhead Games that gives the GM plenty of missile weapons to incorporate into his campaign, ranging from different types of arrows to the Gauntlets of Fire. Those tired of standard fantasy settings will enjoy No Boundaries, as this issue presents "Interstellar Journeys," a massive science fantasy setting with a background only hinted at that allows the GM to customize it.

In addition to gaming goodies, there are interviews, reviews, fan letters, and editorials. The interview in this issue is with none other than Rob Kuntz, one of the original faces in *Dungeons & Dragons*, as well as the author of the upcoming *Codex Germania*. The reviews, while seeming a little high in praise and low in downfall, are generally right on the mark. The editorials are interesting, providing a bit of background on how *Gaming Frontiers* came into its current format, as well as a rant on the poor art found scattered through many *d20* products and a plea to increase that quality immediately.

For those who don't like crunchy bits and are looking for something more fulfilling, there are locations, like The Falling Star, a location within the *Iron Kingdoms* city of Corvis. This inn comes with its own cast of characters and full-color illustrations by none other than Matt Wilson. Those worried that Matt's talents showcased in the first *Iron Kingdoms* trilogy may have faded will be proven wrong; this is some of the best work to come from his fertile mind thus far. Aside from gaming bits, there is also game-related fiction. In this case, Green Ronin Publishing brings us a short story set in the city of Freeport, as well as fiction by Bard's Production and Mystic Eye Games.

The book boasts a lot of graphic design, easily in the ranks with *Dragon Magazine*. Unlike a standard magazine, it has

a very sturdy feel and will endure constant flipping. The layout changes from article to article, separated by the colored edges. Advertising is also full color and isn't just standard **d20** companies, but also web companies like RPGNOW.

Those totally uninterested in the **d20** system will still be amused by Zogonia, an adventuring group with an unusual assortment of characters that bear more than a passing resemblance to many player characters, as well as "Hostile Munchies," an amusing look at what happens when M&Ms go adventuring. In addition to the funnies, Frameworks showcases the art of a'lis (whose web site is <http://22.ari02.net>), as well as a Q&A with the artist.

All in all, the book provides a whole plethora of good gaming material that is useful both at the table and away from it. The only thing I personally hope to see is some work by the Sword & Sorcery Studio group or one of their fellow publishers like Fiery Dragon, Malhavoc Press, or Necromancer Games. The design is up to professional standards, and in some cases, is even better than the **d20** companies that contribute to it. At \$17.95 for a full-color 140 page perfect-bound book, it's a bargain, especially for **d20** players.

--*Joe G. Kushner*

Hurled Into Eternity: The Gunfight At The O.K. Corral

"The real story of the Old West can never be told unless Wyatt Earp will tell what he knows, and Wyatt will not talk."
-- Bat Masterson, quoted in *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal*, by Stuart Lake

In thirty seconds and thirty shots, three men died behind the O.K. Corral in Tombstone, Arizona. It was blood feud and political showdown and law and order, all swirled up together in the powder smoke and sawdust of the Western frontier. It might have been the last battle of the Civil War, or a battle for even more contested ground -- the nature of the American myth, and the right to ride into the sunset, and to return when the land again has need of heroes.

"Three Men Hurled Into Eternity in the Duration of a Moment.

Stormy as were the early days of Tombstone nothing ever occurred equal to the event of yesterday. Since the . . . appointment of V.W. Earp to [town marshal] the town has been noted for its quietness and good order. . . . It seems that this quiet state of affairs was but the calm that precedes the storm that burst in all its fury yesterday, with this difference in results, that the lightning bolt struck . . . with its full and awful force upon those who, heretofore, have made the good name of this county a byword and a reproach, instead of upon some officer in discharge of his duty or a peaceable and unoffending citizen."

-- Tombstone *Daily Epitaph*, Oct. 27, 1881

Wyatt Earp had made a name for himself as assistant city marshal of Dodge City, the wildest cow-town in Kansas. However, when Dodge settled down, Earp's restless nature drew him further west, to the silver mining boom town of Tombstone, Arizona. His brother Virgil Earp was deputy U.S. marshal for the Arizona Territory, and later became town marshal of Tombstone. Wyatt served on and off as deputy sheriff, but soon found himself embroiled in the local political feud between Tombstone's Republican business community (which supported the Earps' law-and-order ways) and the primarily Democratic ranchers such as the Clanton and McLauray families. The Clantons and McLaurys served as fences for cattle, horses, and mules stolen by a gang of mostly former Confederate rustlers known collectively as the Cowboys; the corrupt sheriff John Behan actively connived not only at their thefts, but at robberies of the Wells Fargo stage lines. When politics thwarted the Earps, they picked up extra cash riding shotgun for Wells Fargo. When three Cowboys killed stage driver Bud Philpott, Behan tried to pin it on the Earps; the Earps, meanwhile, set out to prove Clanton involvement.

Ike Clanton apparently agreed to sell out the three Cowboys to Wyatt Earp, but a drunken Wells Fargo agent leaked the deal, and in a panic, Ike repeatedly tried to instigate a gunfight to kill Wyatt and hush up the stink. Unable to catch Wyatt unaware, Ike wound up forced into a confrontation in the back lot between the O.K. Corral and Fly's Photography Studio. Wyatt, Morgan, and Virgil Earp, along with Wyatt's friend the gambler (and deadly gunfighter) Doc Holliday, confronted Ike and Billy Clanton, Tom and Frank McLauray, and another Cowboy named Billy "the Kid" Claiborne around 3:00 in the afternoon on October 26, 1881. As town marshal, Virgil ordered the Cowboys to throw down their weapons (carrying guns being illegal in Tombstone) and put up their hands. Billy Clanton and Wyatt Earp fired simultaneously, and the Gunfight opened. Thirty seconds later, only Wyatt Earp remained unwounded, and Billy Clanton and Tom and Frank McLauray were dead. Ike Clanton and Billy Claiborne fled, and were arrested later.

"Eight rustlers rose up from behind the bank and poured from thirty-five to forty shots into us. Our escape was miraculous. The shots cut our clothes and saddles and killed one horse, but did not hit us. I think we would have been killed if God Almighty wasn't on our side. Wyatt Earp turned loose with a shotgun and killed Curly Bill."

-- Doc Holliday, interviewed in the *Denver Republican*, May 22, 1882

The above narrative has been questioned, not least by Clanton partisans and revisionist historians, but as Allen Barra points out in *Inventing Wyatt Earp*, this is the version that all non-Cowboy witnesses agreed to -- and that even Ike Clanton reported on the day after the Gunfight. Judge Wells Spicer also agreed with it, dismissing all charges against the Earps in a preliminary hearing. (The version of the Gunfight given in *GURPS Old West* is apparently solely based on the Clantons' testimony in that hearing.) However, the Cowboys and their political allies weren't going to give up easily. They redoubled their robberies and rustlings, ambushing Virgil Earp on Fifth Street at midnight on December 28, crippling his arm. "King of the Cowboys" Johnny Ringo and Doc Holliday nearly came to blows -- since the

Clantons had been lurking outside Doc's lodgings on the day of the Gunfight, he had cause for nervousness.

On the night of March 18, 1882, parties unknown (but widely suspected to include Cowboy leader Curly Bill Brocius, Behan's deputy Frank Stilwell, and Florentin "Indian Charlie" Cruz) shot Morgan Earp in the back with a rifle as he played pool, killing him. Wyatt Earp immediately headed to Tuscon to put Virgil on the train to California -- but he ran into Frank Stilwell, lurking by the railroad car with a gun. Wyatt shot Stilwell, and crossed the line into vigilantism. Along with Doc Holliday, Warren Earp (who had come to Tombstone after Virgil's shooting), and three other friends, he rode out of Tombstone on March 21 on his "Vendetta Ride." Wyatt's men killed "Indian Charlie" the next day, and survived another withering daylight gunfight unscathed at Iron Springs on March 23, when he gunned down Curly Bill Brocius and another Cowboy, Johnny Barnes. On July 13, 1882, Johnny Ringo was found dead with a single gunshot wound to his temple, his boots off, and his gunbelt on upside-down. His vendetta complete, Wyatt Earp headed west, for San Francisco and a new wife -- John Behan's ex-girlfriend, the actress Josephine Marcus.

"We had such a séance last night. That evening with Wyatt Earp would have been worth \$1,000 to the newspapers."
-- diary entry by George Parsons, Aug. 30, 1900

However, the ghosts of Tombstone lived on. Literally, in fact; Tombstone has at least six major hauntings, including the Wells Fargo office (an Earp stronghold) and the Grand Hotel (a Clanton hangout), with 31 ghosts sighted at the Bird Cage Theater alone. The phantoms may have appeared early; Wyatt recalled a "veiled figure" of indeterminate gender calling on Virgil's house on Halloween, 1881. Even the names of the two wounded Earps recall the afterworld - - Virgil as the guide of the dead, and Morgan as a masculine "Morrigan," the Irish death-goddess? Morrigan was also a triple-goddess; Morgan closely resembled not only his brother Wyatt, but fellow Wells Fargo agent Fred Dodge. (This resemblance -- or some more sinister transference -- might be why Frank Stilwell's last word was a panicked "Morg!") Morgan was killed on the death-day of Tammuz, and the dogs on the street howled at the moment of his death. (Wyatt killed Curly Bill on the last day of the Feast of Mars.) Wyatt, meanwhile, went to outrageous lengths to conceal his gravesite in San Francisco's Colma cemetery -- it wasn't found until it was robbed in 1957. The grave of Doc Holliday (and that of his father) have still never been found.

"Where's Wyatt?"

Down by the creek, walking on water."

-- Texas Jack Vermillion (Peter Sherayko) and Doc Holliday (Val Kilmer), *Tombstone*

Speaking of Doc Holliday, his father was the head of a Masonic lodge in Valdosta, Georgia; Doc may or may not have also been a Freemason. Wyatt Earp was a Mason, however, although Tombstone's King Solomon Lodge #5 was not chartered until six days after Johnny Ringo's mysterious death (with his legs bare, as in Masonic ritual, and his skull at least symbolically crushed by a gunshot). Was their close, even brotherly, friendship begun with a handshake? The Masonic theme of the three killers repeats itself throughout the saga, from the three murderers of Bud Philpot, to the three assassins who tried to kill Virgil Earp (just minutes before the feast day of St. Thomas a Becket, who was also slain by three unworthy knights), to the three Earp brothers themselves behind the O.K. Corral. Even the town of Tombstone itself recapitulates this theme -- the tombstone is a Masonic symbol, with a Degree of the Monument. The tombstone also recalls the "ashlar" or "squared stone," the Perfected Stone of the Perfected Work. And does the town also memorialize the tombstone carved with "In Arcadia Ego," the resting place of the Grail King?

"Virgil Earp, Wyatt and Morgan were all up there, Morg Earp told me if I wanted to fight to turn myself loose; they all had their hands; I told them again that I was not armed; Doc Holliday said, 'You s-- of a b---, go and arm yourself; I did then go and arm myself; I went back, saw V. Earp and T. McLowry; Virg Earp was playing poker with his pistol in his lap; we were playing poker, we quit at daylight."

-- testimony of Ike Clanton at the inquest into the Gunfight

It was, after all, a king-shifting time -- the [Emperor Norton](#) had died the year before, perhaps opening up the sacred kingship of America again. President Garfield was assassinated on July 2, 1881 (the true birthday of America), and even the Voodoo Queen of New Orleans, Marie Laveau, died that summer. And that year, in a [waste land](#) over a river of silver, death came in threes to Tombstone, Arizona -- where a Southern cavalier with the unhealing wound of tuberculosis ruled a green felt empire of cards. Doc Holliday, they said, had learned card tricks from a housemaid

named Sophie (recalling Sophia, the Gnostic spirit of illumination), and consorted with a mysterious Hungarian prostitute named Kate Harony -- also known as Kate Fisher. In the Gunfight, Doc received only a minor wound -- in the side. Was Doc Holliday, Fisher King, guarded by avatars of Gawain, Gaheris, Agravain, and Gareth in the form of Wyatt Earp and his three brothers?

This could explain why mortal enemies Ike Clanton, Virgil Earp, Tom McLaury, Doc Holliday, and John Behan played cards all night the night before the Gunfight: they were desperately gambling for the sacred throne of America on the eve of the Roman "Ludi Victoria" -- the games of victory. Whatever the cards said that night, the final hand played out the next day. If Doc was the Grail King (of Hearts, or Cups), Wyatt was the Ace of Spades -- the death card. Virgil was the Knight (or Jack) of Spades, leaving Morgan as the Ten -- the card which, in the Tarot, is depicted as a man stabbed in the back, just as Morgan would be shot in the back the next spring. (Morgan was also shot in the back at the Gunfight.) Kate Fisher (the Queen of Hearts), who watched from Fly's studio next door, was the Queen in the hole. The Cowboys desperately tried to fill a full house from their two pair of Clantons and McLaurys. Witnesses reported several different Cowboys going in and out of the Corral moments before the Gunfight, but when last call came, they were stuck with Billy "the Kid" Claiborne (no doubt trying to assume the mantle of the "real" Billy the Kid, who had been killed on July 14, 1881) to fill their hand. The Fisher King's royal straight (and Wyatt Earp's solar invulnerability) beat the Cowboys' two pair, and the West was won for Masonic order, four square and on the level. Doc Holliday died in bed at the Glenwood Hotel in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, on November 8, 1887 -- the feast of the Quattuor Coronati, the Four Kings. His cousin Melanie, a nun, burned his letters, saying only that "the world would have known a different man." But the world never did. Because Doc Holliday was dead -- and because Wyatt Earp will not talk.

Go Ahead; Make Mistakes . . . It'll All Be Fine

I've always admired the work of Dr. Spock, and was fairly sad when he died. After he gave his life to save the crew of the *Enterprise*, I found myself . . .

Er, no, wait, that's *Mr.* Spock. And he got better. He's still around, as far as I know.

No, Dr. Benjamin Spock was a pediatrician and an outspoken expert on raising children, having written (and revised many times) *Dr. Spock's Baby & Child Care*. But what was admirable about him (to me) was that he believed in parents' abilities to raise their own kids. He was really the first person who let parents know that it would probably all work out all right.

While previous "experts" gave the impression that *anything you did wrong would kill your child* (or at least *horribly warp its eggshell mind for life*), Dr. Spock was much more reassuring. "It'll all be okay," he seemed to say. One mistake won't be devastating. Small mistakes won't be catastrophic. We're human; we don't need to be perfect. Just love and nurture your kid, follow your instincts, and you'll be fine.

This was an incredibly radical idea in the 1940s.

So Dr. Spock's book sold a jillion copies, and an entire generation of kids was raised by parents who *weren't* advised to tie their kid's arms down at night to deter finger-sucking. Then we landed on the moon and created MTV. (I may be jumping a bit here . . .)

Anyway, I've always respected the general optimism of Dr. Spock and his works. And I've always felt it should truly be applied to the rest of the world.

Cooking? That extra pinch of cardamom won't prove devastating. Dating? That one dumb joke probably won't ruin everything. Playing a musical instrument? That dropped note won't destroy the symphony.

And gaming? You don't need to be perfect, or please everyone.

So, if (for example) a certain Managing Editor of a certain game company said that a certain series of columns involving [Simulationist versus Romantic theories](#) bored him silly . . . well, it's not the end of the world. Mailing a mummified hand to a hypothetical [Andrew H.](#) is *completely* uncalled for, as one will almost certainly realize the day after visiting the post office.

But seriously, it's a piece of advice that seems so obvious to me now, but as I look back on my earliest gaming experiences, it's something that bears repeating. "Repeat to yourself, 'It's just a game; I should really just relax.'" I remember when I GMed my first sessions. I was so concerned about doing things right; I was terrified I'd make a mistake that would somehow ruin everything. I constantly grilled my players for input: "Am I doing okay? Any comments? Anything you like or don't like?" While in my opinion it's good to be communicative with your players, it's also possible to carry that philosophy of openness to neurosis. Yes, I made mistakes, big and small. (Thanks to a vague, sketchy knowledge of *GURPS Supers* at the time of running my first-ever adventure, I barbecued a hero in my first combat, causing me to backpedal and create a *deus ex machina* that became a plot device for over a year.) Sometimes the mistakes I made were [devastating](#), but usually [they weren't](#). And I've made mistakes as a player, too. (For example, I think my former *Vampire* GM still thinks I was exercising a good roleplaying choice by succumbing to the beast and devouring an innocent kid instead of spending a Willpower point to keep the beast in check. Really, I just forgot I could do that. Whoops.)

Regardless of my mistakes, the world has continued to rotate. Despite bumps along the way, my players have continued to have fun, I've enjoyed myself as a player, and the hobby has generally been a source of joy for those I've known who have been involved in it.

Too many articles or other game-related writing (my own included, I perhaps think) can give the impression that, if you don't follow their advice to the letter, your gaming is doomed. Yes, there are mistakes you can make -- GMs shouldn't arbitrarily kill PCs any more than parents should let their babies drive a riding mower -- but those are pretty easily learned even when they *aren't* intuitive. That just isn't the case; there's definitely a philosophical place just trusting your instincts, providing an environment that's conducive to fun, and learning from your mistakes. It'll all work out just fine.

Unless you make a horrible mistake that kills your players!

Er, no . . . just kidding.

* * *

(Confidential to Andrew H. in Austin, TX: Please write "Return to Sender" on the next box you receive from Tallahassee, FL.)

* * *

(Sorry I forgot to mention this last week; I was really busy . . .)

Those of you who are habitual *Pyramid* reloaders may have noticed something different this week. Namely, that we actually have news in our News section. Quality news, to boot.

Now, I like to think I have a fair number of talents that I bring to the *Pyramid* table. But, really, my journalistic abilities have *never* been among those.

Fortunately, Steve Jackson Games is lucky enough to have Scott Haring back, as a man of many hats. And for one of those hats, *Pyramid* is fortunate to have him back here as our new newshound. Welcome back, Scott! Scott's pinky has more journalistic abilities than an infinite number of mes at typewriters.

If you have any *Pyramid* news or items to report, please use our new news email address at (appropriately) pyramidnews@sjgames.com . We also have a new newsgroup exclusively for news tips and news item discussions (sjgames.news for NNTP users, [Industry News](#) for web users).

(And, of course, if you want to write me for some reason, feel free to use pyramid@sjgames.com)

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Pokémon Jr. Adventure Game**, p. 30.*

(Three stars) "HE FLIES, HE DIES, SHE CRIES

"Tragedy struck on campus today as the team mascot, Captain Chicken, leapt from the stadium press box and fell to his death. The mascot, played by sophomore Darryl Tate, was a fixture at football games and University functions."

Around the World on a Shilling

The Great Exhibition of 1851

Edited by Scott Larson

*(Editor's Note -- The following clipping was culled from a scrapbook of Victoriana discovered in the attic of a semi-detached in Sydenham. While the author's observations were clearly intended to edify his contemporaries, I think they will prove useful to the Game Master of such Victorian roleplaying games as **GURPS Steampunk**, **Screampunk**, **Castle Falkenstein**, **Forgotten Futures**, or **Terra Incognita**. I have interpolated a few parenthetical clarifications as well as modernizing the spelling and punctuation.)*

London, 1851

Where might one find a brace of cursed diamonds, a facsimile machine, Colt revolvers, an alarm bed that tips the sleeper into a cold bath, a mechanical man, a flying machine, Dr. Merryweather's leech-powered Tempest Prognosticator, Chartists, Charles' (Babbage, Dickens, and Sibthorp), Charlotte Brontë, and Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, together under a single roof?

Your Humble Correspondent, otherwise known as Hyacinth Lake Peabody of the prestigious Daily Tocsin, will answer this query: the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, held in the Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park from May to October of 1851. Part art gallery, part trade show, part curiosity shop, part imperial pageant, the Great Exhibition beckoned the world to England to wonder at the fruits of industry of all nations.

Our Story Begins . . .

As our glorious Nineteenth century reached its midpoint, Britain had come to feel the pinch. British manufactures compared poorly with continental counterparts by emphasizing cheapness and utility over elegance in design. Her public schools, focused on the humanities, did not prepare young Britons for an industrial future. Britain had originated and disseminated the Industrial Revolution, but her preeminent position was by no means assured. One concerned party was Mr. Henry Cole.

Responsible for the penny post and the Public Records Office, children's book author, originator of the Christmas card, designer of fine china as "Felix Summerly," Henry Cole (1808-1882) was a vigorous Victorian polymath who imprinted his mark upon the era. (He would serve as potent patron for Crystal Palace adventurers -- his dynamic enthusiasm infused the project from start to finish.) Cole thought British industry needed an invigorating tonic to stimulate consumption, encourage innovation, and enlarge the market for goods. He joined the Society of Arts, which gave small industrial exhibitions with cash prizes. Inspired by the French National Exhibitions held since 1798, Cole proposed that the Society organize an international industrial exhibition. Such an undertaking would depend upon royal patronage, however, so Cole called upon the Society's President.

The Worthy Soul in question, to whom the entire success of the Exhibition was later ascribed, was Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Consort to Queen Victoria. Prince Albert (1819-1861) found himself in that peculiar position of Royal Consort -- married to the Queen (since 1840, when they were both aged 21) but not himself the Sovereign. He discovered, frustratingly, that though the Queen adored him as an angel, she steadfastly kept him at arm's length regarding affairs of state. Prince Albert was in need of a project.

Albert could initially bestow only a tepid response to Cole's suggestion. His foreign birth and manners aroused suspicion in the English people and he feared public demonstration for an enterprise that could prove to be unpopular. Undaunted, Cole made the rounds of manufacturing towns, eager to trade on Albert's patronage to generate public interest. As a rolling ball of snow gradually grows when each composing particle clings with equal commitment to the core and chance met fellows upon the ground, knowing that over engagement in either direction would consign the entire enterprise to oblivion -- so the plan for the Great Exhibition proceeded with provisional inevitability.

Queen Victoria legitimized the proceedings in January of 1850 by appointing a Royal Commission with Albert presiding. The Commission avoided imputations of governmental jobbery (awarding contracts to cronies, which had marred the recent construction of the Houses of Parliament) by decreeing that the Exhibition would be funded by public subscription. Owing to his zealous fund-raising, Albert was mercilessly lampooned in Punch as an obsequious panhandler with hat out for his hobby-horse. Donations ranged from the Queen's £1000 to pennies sent in by children.

A number of factors made the century's mid-point particularly favorable for such a grand enterprise. The rapid expansion of a national railway system would enable Britons from the furthest reaches of the island to travel affordably to London. Sir Robert Peel -- former Prime Minister, political advisor, and revered figure -- had transformed the political environment to favor free trade. By repealing the Corn Laws in 1846 (introduced in 1815 to protect British farmers from a flood of cheap continental corn following Napoleon's defeat, but which kept prices artificially high), Peel gave the people cheap bread but brought down his government. His 1845 repeal of the window tax was equally crucial, as we shall see.

Sir Robert Peel (1788-1850) was a pivotal figure in the transition from the Georgian to Victorian eras. As Home Secretary in 1829, he helped to pass a bill for Catholic Emancipation and established the London Police (called "Bobbies" in his honor). A vocal proponent of the Exhibition, Peel's tragic death in July 1850 from injuries sustained in a riding accident spurred plans onward, uniting the House of Commons to honor his final wish.

Before the idea could be firmly embraced by the public, all and sundry expressed their misgivings. Manufacturers feared that England's inadequate copyright laws would allow competitors to steal their ideas. They fretted that style and elegance of design (continental strong points) would be favored over cheapness of production. The public had doubts of their own. They feared foreign agitators would infest London to continue the revolutions of 1848. Britain's homegrown radicals, the Chartists (proponents of the People's Charter of 1838 that called for universal male suffrage) remained a potent bugaboo. Newspapers predicted apocalypses of Biblical proportions -- influenza, bubonic plague, cholera, famine, fire, foreign revolution, and the proverbial Pride that goeth before a Fall.

The choice of site was the next sticking point. The first choice, the south end of Hyde Park, met resistance from the well-heeled lobby representing Kensington and Belgravia, who did not want their fashionable addresses trampled beneath the feet of a descending multitude. Charles Babbage favored the Park's east end. Ever obsessive, he calculated the cost to national productivity due to extra footsteps needed to walk from central London. Colonel Charles Sibthorp, clamorous critic of Prince Albert and the Exhibition, apparently discovered an inchoate environmentalist streak and launched the final, perhaps most desperate objection in the name of elm trees.

YHC can conjure either Sibthorp (1783-1855) or Babbage (1791-1871) in the role of villain hatching a dastardly plot. Jingoist Sibthorp was responsible for reducing Albert's annuity from £50,000 to £30,000, opposed the Public Libraries Act of 1850 because he hated reading, and decried the Exhibition from start to finish. Could this xenophobic MP enlist the services of one Karl Marx to foment revolution, thus discrediting the foreign Prince? Babbage was passed over for the Commission and, adding insult to injury, they declined to exhibit his Difference Engine! What if such an indignity had spurred Babbage to complete his analytical engine and put it to work doing more than correcting navigational tables? He did publish a scathing monograph on the shortcomings of the Exhibition.

In March of 1850, the Commission invited architectural tenders for a structure to house the Great Exhibition. The criteria specified that the design be simple, economical, adaptable, fireproof, and preserve the elms. The Commission received 245 proposals, none of which they liked, instead producing one their own by I.K. Brunel (who would go on to design the mammoth Great Eastern, an unprofitable passenger steamship eventually relegated to laying the trans-Atlantic telegraph cable). The Commission's design was roundly criticized for being monotonous and dubiously temporary, requiring some 19 million bricks.

Enter Joseph Paxton (1801-1865), superintendent of the Duke of Devonshire's gardens at Chatsworth, Derbyshire. Paxton had built innovative conservatories for the giant Victoria regia lily and designed a park in Birkenhead that became Olmsted's model for New York's Central Park. Paxton's disparagement of Brunel's design elicited an invitation to improve upon it, although the competition was long concluded. Paxton worked feverishly on his design while he ought to have been absorbing the details of the disciplinary action over which he presided (observer Charles Dickens ascribed his industry to copious note-taking). The result was a now famous sketch upon pink blotting paper, a great Athena of a plan that sprang fully-realized from the brow of our Jovian husbandman. It was a temple of glass and steel, materials YHC suspects will one day supplant stone due to their supple substance. Punch dubbed the structure the "Crystal Palace," the Commission approved

the design on July 15, and work on the foundation began two weeks later.

The Crystal Palace

The Crystal Palace



The Crystal Palace was a wonder of harmonious economy. Completely prefabricated, it could be expeditiously assembled and disassembled. Modular design allowed for expansion or contraction without compromising aesthetic impact. Construction attracted such attention that the contractors, Fox and Henderson enclosed the site with wooden hoardings (later utilized for the Palace's floorboards) and instituted a five-shilling admission. Work continued into the winter night, illuminated by lanterns and bonfires -- a wonder indeed!

Construction was not without complications. Miss Ann Hicks ran a cake and fruit stall on the site, living in an adjacent shack. She only conceded to move following the Duke of Wellington's generous incentive of £92 11 s. 4 d. The irrepressible Miss Hicks spent the money by October, applying for more following the close of Exhibition -- to no avail. Mr. William St.Clair, glazier and agent provocateur, led a small strike for higher wages. His attempt to extort the contractors publicly resulted in his arrest and rapid replacement of the striking workers. A wagon containing 250 gallons of beer completely healed the labor rift.

Paxton's innovative design engendered a fresh round of public fears -- hail would shatter the glass panels; wind and the weight of visitors would initiate vibrations that tear the joints apart and collapse the building like a house of glass cards. As a test, the contractors raised a section of and crowded it with 300 intrepid workers. They repeated the experiment with Royal Sappers and Miners who energetically marked time. A violent hailstorm on April 29 served as final examination -- not a pane of glass was damaged.

Acolytes invoke cathedral terminology to describe their Temple of Industry. The nave ran east-west for 1851 feet, neatly bisected by a perpendicular transept soaring to 108 feet and neatly enclosing three venerable elms. The Palace incorporated 293,655 panes of glass and covered sixteen acres of ground. Canvas draped between the roof ridges deflected sun and heat. The hollow steel columns served as downspouts for 24 miles of wooden gutters. Cooling was effected by clockwork louvers, comfortably operated by a single soul, that allowed hot air to escape and drew cool air through gaps in the floorboards. Rubbish was swept through these same gaps.

The Crystal Palace incarnated elemental harmony. Securely founded upon the Earth (the footings remain beneath the turf of Hyde Park to this day) and composed of Earth/Fire composites of steel and glass. Summer showers would create a delicate lattice of Water, running from horizontal gutters to vertical downspouts. Copious cubic feet of Air were enclosed in glass. Finally, Fire generated steam, the emblem of the age. YHC notes that the Commission made an implicit pact with Fire by waiving the requirement that the structure be fireproof. One wonders if this favor will one day be called in?

While many of today's youth were enthusiastic, YHC spoke to one William Morris, aged 17, who was markedly scornful. Ruskin declared it "a cucumber frame between two chimneys," aesthete Sir Edward Burne-Jones thought it cheerless, and Gothic revivalist Augustus Pugin advised Paxton: "You had better keep to building greenhouses and I will keep to my churches and cathedrals." YHC most enjoyed the witty Duke of Devonshire: "Fancy one's gardener having done all this!"

The Great Exhibition

The Great Exhibition opened on May 1, 1851. Prince Albert spoke, then Her Majesty, Queen Victoria. The Archbishop of Canterbury offered a special prayer, followed by Handel's invigorating Hallelujah chorus. Adding to the excitement, a foreign dignitary in Mandarin garb approached the Queen's dais and made obeisance. He was later discovered to be an uninvited Chinese ship captain, seeking to publicize tours of his junk anchored in the Thames!

The Palace's doors opened at 9:00 and closed at 5:00, Monday through Saturday. Season tickets cost £3 2 s. for men and £2 2 s. for women. Common folk could afford to attend when admittance dropped to a shilling on May 23. An average of 50,000 souls passed through the turnstiles on shilling days, with the highest attendance -- 109,915 -- on October 7. The Exhibition drew a quarter of England's population of 22 million and 58,000 foreign visitors. By the public close on October 11, paying admissions totaled 6,039,195.

The Exhibition comprised 7381 British and 6556 foreign exhibits. The ground floor held the majority while the galleries were reserved for lighter articles such as clothing, philosophical instruments, and food products. For those souls concerned about personal comfort, YHC happily reports that Mr. George Jennings, sanitation engineer, designed private retiring rooms. By October 15, 827,000 individuals had paid a penny for the privilege of their use. Refreshments, available in three locations and catered by Messrs. Schweppes & Co., were mercilessly criticized (save their delicious ginger beer). YHC predicts a bright future for another retail entrepreneur, Mr. Charles Harrod, whose modest shop nearby made respectable profits this summer owing to Exhibition traffic.

The Great Exhibition helped to forge a new relationship between the monarchy and the people. Albert accepted an invitation to dine in Yorkshire with manufacturers who previously would have been summoned to London. After June 24, the Queen Herself walked among her subjects during public hours, despite four previous attempts upon her life, the most recent in 1850. Queen Victoria passed at least 50 hours in rapt attention at her beloved's glorious Exhibition.

Most august personages of our epoch could be found at the Exhibition. Miss Charlotte Brontë, author of *Jane Eyre*, made three visits in late May and early June. She shared an observation from her journal with YHC: "It may be called a Bazaar or fair -- but it is such a Bazaar or fair as eastern Genii might have created. It seems as if magic only could have gathered this mass of wealth from all the ends of the Earth -- as if none but supernatural hands could have arranged it thus -- with such a blaze of contrast and colors and marvelous powers of effect." Fellow authors Messrs. William Thackeray and Charles Dickens both enjoyed their visits. (Dickens would later make rather uncharitable observations concerning the foreign exhibits and their exhibitors, particularly the Chinese). YHC spoke with a plucky lad of eleven in Dorchester, Master Thomas Hardy, who was delighted by excursion trains bearing day-trippers to the Crystal Palace.

Notable Exhibits

While most guides endeavor to describe each of the 13,937 exhibits, one does not wish inflict such tedium upon your attention. Instead, Your Humble Correspondent will serve as cicerone to the "high lights" of the Exhibition -- those exhibits guaranteed to excite wonder and astonishment, and furnish diverse illuminating observations thereupon. A model of Cartesian convenience, the Palace precisely indicted each 24 by 24 foot exhibition bay with a red banner emblazoned with letter/number coordinates. The accompanying map can guide you to the following notable exhibits. For a more thorough, if pedestrian, inventory, YHC recommends The Crystal Palace Exhibition Illustrated Catalogue.

Let us commence our journey at the centerpiece of the Exhibition, the 27-foot glass fountain of Mr. Follett Ossler. Fashioned from diaphanous pink glass, lit dramatically from above by the transept, the fountain encapsulated the wonder of the experience. Surrounded by exotic flora and palms, one is immediately cognizant of being transported to a crystalline fairyland.

The fabled Koh-i-noor diamond has lately come to England as spoils from the Punjab. Purported to be cut from the legendary but lost Great Mogul diamond, the name of this 186-carat stone has an interesting story. A courtesan informed Persian conqueror Nadir Shah that his foe had hid the diamond in his turban. Nadir invoked the custom of exchanging turbans, exclaiming "mountain of light" at first sight of his new prize. Unfortunately, the stone bears a curse: its owner will one day rule the world, but no man dare wear it. The Koh-i-noor has been particularly ungrateful to male owners, from Ranjit Singh, whose line was extinguished when none of eight descendants could produce an heir, to young Duleep Singh, whose defeat brought it here. Thus far, the only ill effects experienced here have been the people's complaints that the stone does not live up to its name.

Acquired by Mr. Henry Thomas Hope in 1830, the Blue Diamond (44.5 carats, originally 112.5) is certain to delight. The stone was reputedly pried from the eye socket of an idol in the temple of Rama-sitra, near Mandalay, and therefore carries a curse. Louis XIV purchased it from Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (died bankrupt) for his mistress, Mme. de Montespan (implicated in the "affair of poisons" and retired to a convent). Louis XVI presented it to Marie Antoinette (both were beheaded) who lent it to the Princess de Lamballe (slain by a mob and then beheaded).

In addition to these marvels, the Exhibition features many other notable "industrial raw materials," following Prince Albert's taxonomy. Examples include Brazil's famous Black Bahia diamond; the world's largest pearl (which belongs to Mr. Alexander Hope, son of Henry); and cruder items such as the largest object ever extracted from the earth: a piece of coal from Tipton, Staffordshire with a circumference of 18 feet.

One's mind simply reels with the possible malicious machinations that might be enjoined by their present proximity. With only a modicum of strategy, a common thief could make off with terrestrial treasures of incalculable value. An industrious soul might combine one of these cursed stones with the nearby set of lighthouse lenses, the 20-foot astronomical telescope, or the world's largest looking glass at the Palace's west end, to fashion a contrivance most nefarious. Chartist uprisings should be the least of Britannia's fears!

Mr. Frederick Blakewell exhibited a functioning facsimile machine. This ingenious device utilizes a rotating drum traversed by a stylus, which transmits over telegraphic wire a perfect reproduction of a document. YHC imagines the advantage of such a device to correspondents in the field. Of perhaps more limited utility is the tempest prognosticator of Dr. Merryweather. This device audibly signals impending inclement weather by means of the undulations of common leeches -- a creature of unappreciated sensitivity. Among the notable timepieces and globes was a remarkable apparatus created Mr. Ryles of Staffordshire. Based upon the theory that our Earth is a living creature, the device calculated the rise and fall of the tides as a function of the organism's beating heart. An inventive alarm bed that gracefully inclined the reposing sleeper particularly engaged the Queen; it could be outfitted with a tub of cold water for the incorrigibly somnolent.

YHC confides that he was quite tempted to conceal himself among the wonders in order to emerge after hours to try the amazing aerial machine exhibited by Mr. William Sadd of Wandsworth. The conveyance incorporates two large horizontal balloons of cylindrical aspect for lift, a rudder fore and aft for navigation, two floats for ballast, and a pair of rotating wheels for propulsion. One might also note that the Serpentine, winding through Hyde Park just to the north of the Crystal Palace, audibly summons the model of a submarine boat exhibited by Mr. Hugh Bell. YHC imagines a party of intrepid submariners employing this device first to examine the large-scale model frigate Prince of Wales at anchor and then onward to other clandestine pursuits.

Certain to be a boon for veterans, Major Little's spectacular artificial hand fairly bristles with efficacious if formidable hooks. YHC was likewise favorably impressed by a demonstration of Count Dunin's mechanical man. This metallic manikin comprises some 7000 adjustable steel plates allowing it to contract or expand "from the size of the Apollo Belvedere to that of a colossal statue." The gadget aids dressmaker or tailor by exactly emulating the size of the model, thereby obviating the nuisance of repeated fittings. Perhaps it was the tick-tock of nearby clockwork, or the whoosh of the steam engines below, or even the exhibits featuring the novel plaything that is "electrical power," -- YHC's imagination was overcome by an army of such constructs serving not only as mechanical modistes, but performing any number of quotidian diligences, thus freeing the human mind for profounder pondering.

YHC was truly edified by several industrial exhibits. A scale model of the Liverpool docks, in which 5 miles was reduced to 40 feet, contained 1600 miniature ships. De La Rue's patent envelope maker could fashion 60 per minute while operated by children. A steam-powered Jacquard Loom was notable for the complex weaving instructions encoded upon punched cards. One wonders if such procedure could be utilized by Mr. Babbage and his colleague, Countess Lovelace, in their analytical endeavors? (Lady Ada died the next year, like Lord Byron her father, aged 36. Babbage would never complete his analytical engine.)

Finally, we complete our circuit of the British wing with a few contemplative moments in the medieval court of Augustus Pugin who so recently decorated the interior of the new Houses of Parliament. The court is resplendent with ornate ecclesiastical furniture, tapestry, and adornment. While one purpose of Pugin's exhibit was to contrast the beauty of handmade items to those manufactured goods, Mr. Jordan's Patent Carving Mechanism, enabling mass production of household items and altars in the Gothic style, was conspicuous. Sculpture of Biblical and classical theme scandalized the viewers by their depictions of feminine nudity (some were temporarily garbed with strategic fig leaves). The nearby 16 foot stone Irish cross, hewn by Harriet Ross, also troubled Anglicans with its excessive qualities. Four majestic pipe organs and the display of stained glass running the entire length of the eastern gallery completed the Gothic motif.

Augustus Pugin (1812-1852) was instrumental in propagating the Victorian Gothic revival. Pugin imbued his designs with Catholic ideology (he converted to the faith in 1835), arguing in *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841) that only a Catholic society could produce true gothic architecture. Is it not curious that Mr. Pugin perished at such a young age, immediately following the Exhibition? Perhaps the result of reading too much Walpole, Lewis, Shelley, Maturin, and Polidori, YHC envisions Gothic mists gathering over England -- even, dare one assert, a Sovereign who has succumbed to the sinister spell. YHC trusts he is not trying the reader's patience with such fervid imaginings.

The French display, the largest following Great Britain, was remarkable for its elegance. YHC noticed a few items characterized by an innovation wholly unexpected. Notable were two portable devices for taking sun-drawn pictures, along with examples of images of an effect most artistic. The originator of the process, Mr. Daguerre regrettably shuffled off this mortal coil at home in France during the Exhibition's run. One would be remiss to omit Froment's improved turbine, capable of 200 rpm. YHC imagines the coupling of such puissant propulsion with the Mr. Sudd's above-described conveyance, one day enabling intrepid aeronauts to crisscross the skies and thus permanently knitting together the disparate nations gathered today.

Item 248 attracted the attention of this bibliophile: "one hundred and sixty-five volumes of works in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, published at Boulac" (save two, YHC notes, published in the city of the greatest library of antiquity: Alexandria). The worthy Mohammed Ali Pasha presented these volumes, the first published in Egypt, to Her Majesty, the Queen. The beautiful, sturdy tomes treat a range of topics, from military matters to veterinary practice. Further inquiry by YHC reveals that 65 volumes -- concerning Egyptian literature, grammar, and religion -- went missing following the Exhibition's close. A development most curious, to be sure.

The contrivances from America, characterized by artless simplicity, are inconsistent if impressive. Here one finds a stuffed squirrel alongside a Singer sewing machine, a lump of zinc weighing eight tons and a McCormick reaper, self-inflating India rubber lifeboats by Mr. Charles Goodyear and Colt's revolver. Also notable was the air-exhausted coffin that preserves its occupant indefinitely through an ingenious use of vacuum. Mr. Hiram Powers' sculpture the Greek Slave was much admired, as was a tea service fashioned entirely from California gold. The crack American locksmith Mr. A.C. Hobbs took old John Bull down a notch by picking the lock safeguarding the Bank of England twice in 30 minutes. He then won £200 for 51 hours' work opening an "unpickable" device from Bramah. We need not mention that no one attempted to breach the Day and Newell locks Mr. Hobbs represented. YHC heard that the Bank of England purchased a set! -- one trusts the stunt wasn't a ruse.

The beautiful exhibits from the Zollverein (the German trade confederation) include the comicalities of Herr Hermann Ploucquat of Stuttgart. These whimsical tableaux feature stuffed animals assuming the roles of humans. In a favorite, a stern marten schoolmistress lectures four recalcitrant rabbits, replete with tiny primers. YHC observed a group of London schoolchildren (there were nearly 3,000 such visitors on September 18) speculating that perhaps the animals were merely enchanted and would disport and explore after hours!

Your Humble Correspondent now bids you adieu, leaving you to your own exploration. The Great Exhibition was a summation of current industrial development as well as a harbinger of a mechanized future. During the summer of 1851 one can expect to encounter every person, product, or idea of substance -- a veritable microcosm of the World at the fulcrum of

our century.

Afterwards

Editor's note -- The clipping was accompanied by several others. We summarize their content in the interest of brevity.

The Great Exhibition made an unexpected profit of £186,000, which the Commission used to buy the Gore estate in South Kensington. The site would eventually hold the Victoria and Albert Museum, the museums of Science and Natural History, the Royal Geographic Society, the Royal Albert Hall, and the Imperial College of Science and Technology. The Crystal Palace was moved in 1854 to Sydenham Hill in the southeast of greater London. There it was enlarged, a transept added, and flanked by crystal towers. The exhibits included courts celebrating several ancient cultures (Egyptian, Pompeiian, Chinese, Moorish, Byzantine, etc.), outdoor mazes, and reconstructions of dinosaurs (which remain to the present). The Palace's fortunes eventually waned; it was used as a naval supply depot during the Great War, but reopened as an attraction in 1920. On November 30, 1936 the promise to Fire was called in -- a conflagration beginning in an office consumed the Palace entire.

The Great Exhibition was replicated in Paris (1855), New York (1853), again in London (1862), Vienna (1873), Philadelphia (1876), Sydney (1879), et al. Numerous innovations, such as the telephone, Ferris Wheel, and the Eiffel Tower were first exhibited at such exhibitions. In America, they came to be called World's Fairs -- the last significant one held in Queens in 1939. The Festival of Britain marked the centenary of the Great Exhibition, while the recent Millennium Dome was inspired by the splendor of the Crystal Palace.

Resources

- *Albert's Exhibition and the Crystal Palace.* -- www.cyberstation.net/hf/cp/crystal.html -- Collects all the images.
- Art-Journal. *The Crystal Palace Exhibition Illustrated Catalogue.* London: Dover, 1970. Unforgivably emphasizes objects of beauty and elegance at the expense of the ingenious and outré.
- Auerbach, Jeffrey. *The Great Exhibition of 1851.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. ISBN: 0300080077. The most scholarly book of the lot; examines the Exhibition in historical context.
- *The Crystal Palace/The Great Exhibition of 1851.* -- www.victorianstation.com/palace.html -- Neatly summarized with images. Victoria Station provides much interesting Victoriana.
- *Crystal Palace Design.* -- jefferson.village.virginia.edu/london/model/earth.html -- Excellent site devoted to the architecture of the Crystal Palace. I haven't been able to get the VRML models to work.
- Davis, John. *The Great Exhibition.* Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1999. ISBN: 0750916141. Notable for the inclusion of photographs of the Exhibition as well as the familiar engravings.
- De Vries, Leonard. *Victorian Inventions.* London: John Murray, 1971. ISBN: 0719550068. All of these gadgets postdate the Great Exhibition, but they illustrate the fruition of Victorian ingenuity.
- *The Great Exhibition: Cole, Albert, and Paxton.* -- www.cyberstation.net/hf/cp/cap.html -- Neatly summarized, with images.
- Leapman, Michael. *The World for a Shilling.* London: Headline Book Publishing, 2001. ISBN: 0747270120. My favorite. Leapman captures the sights, sounds, smells, and sense of spectacle. I had to special order this one from England through Blackwell's Online.
- While set after the Great Exhibition, the novels *The Difference Engine* by Gibson and Sterling and *Anno Dracula* by Newman treat some of the themes here presented.

Odin, King of the Aesir

For *In Nomine*

by Bevan Thomas

Corporeal Forces - 5 Strength 10 Agility 10
Ethereal Forces - 5 Intelligence 12 Precision 8
Celestial Forces - 6 Will 12 Perception 12

Charisma +3

Skills: Detect Lies/6, Dodge/6, Driving/3, Fast Talk/6, Fighting/5, Knowledge (Celestials)/4, Knowledge (Marches)/6, Knowledge (Mythology and Religion)/6, Knowledge (Sorcery)/6, Languages (Norse/6, English/6), Large Weapon/6 (Spear), Large Weapon/4 (Sword), Lying/6, Move Silently/4, Riding/6, Savoir-Faire/3, Seduction/2, Singing/6, Throwing/6

Songs: Attraction (Corporeal/4, Celestial/4), Direction (Corporeal/4, Ethereal/4), Form (Ethereal/4), Shields (Ethereal/4, Celestial/6)

Special Song: Changeskin (Ethereal/6): A song that Odin shares with his blood-brother Loki. For 1 Essence, Odin can take any form, from the size of a mouse to a giant. Odin's possessions change with him. However, no matter his form, Odin is always missing his right eye and his left eye is a blazing blue.

Artifacts: Draupnir ("Ever-Drinking") is a ring of priceless value and Odin's kingly seal. It functions as a Reliquary/6, every nine nights, it produces nine non-magical rings of identical appearance and value (non-supernatural) to Draupnir. Odin gives these rings as gifts to those mortals who have earned his favor.

Gungnir is a great hunting spear, and the favored weapon of Odin. It was forged by dwarfs long ago and according to legend it never misses (this is an exaggeration, Odin is simply very good with it). Odin has been known to change the course of battles by shaking his spear over the heads of those he has decided will lose, filling them with fear and foreboding, shattering their confidence. It functions as a Talisman with Large Weapon/6 (Spear), Throwing/6, acts as a Reliquary/6 with Nightmares (Corporeal/6).

Hlidskjalf ("High-Seat") is Odin's imperial throne. It functions as a Reliquary/6 with Sight (Ethereal/6). However, the range of the song is much greater than usual, allowing Odin to see anywhere in the eight Nordic ethereal realms (Alfheim, Asgard, Jotunheim, Musplheim, Nidavellir, Niflheim, Svartalfheim, and Vanaheim) and the countries where the Nordic gods held sway (Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden).

Special Rites: Gain 1 Essence when he discovers an important secret.

Gain 2 Essence when an army he supports wins a battle.

Worship Rites: The following ones on p. 95 of the Marches apply: one hour meditating, sacrificing money, sacred herbs, or humans (human sacrifice is not usually done nowadays), three hours reading stories of the god Sacrificing Wine (at least 1 pitcher)

Whispering a secret (which Odin does not know) in the ear of his effigy

This ancient god has been known as Allfod ("All-Father"), Bileyg ("One-Eye"), Grimmir ("Masked One"), Helblindi ("One-Who-Blinds-With-Death"), Herteit ("Glad-Of-War"), and many more. He is a god of rulership, death, war, poetry, treasure, knowledge, sorcery, and all else that the ancient Nordic people held dear. Though his power has greatly decreased due to lack of Essence, he still remains a deadly warrior and a wily adversary.

Odin's true form is that of an old man with gray hair and a muscular frame. He is missing his right eye and his left eye is blue, penetrating and wise. When in Asgard, Odin usually appears in golden armor, decked in all the regalia of a warrior-king. However, when he wanders the Ethereal and Corporeal planes, Odin prefers to wear simple traveling clothes and a wide-brimmed hat pulled over his missing eye. Odin can take many other forms as well, favoring such forms as an eagle, a wolf, or a young warrior. However, a perceptive viewer can always recognize him from his eyes.

No matter the form he takes, if it is human, Odin always carries his spear Gungnir. Most of the time, Odin disguises Gungnir as a staff or a walking stick. Odin also always wears Draupnir. To hide it, Odin frequently wears gloves.

In the old days, Odin would lead warriors of his choosing to victory, riding at their forefront with his wolves and causing enemies to quake at sight of his spear. However, the Celestials stopped this practice, depriving Odin of much of his Essence. To accommodate for that, Odin spends most of his time wandering Earth and the Marches, uncovering secrets in order to stop himself from fading further.

Though he is in theory the chief of the Aesir, currently Odin is lord in name only. He spends almost all of his time sitting on Hlidskjalf, his gaze spread-out throughout the realms, looking for secrets to give him Essence and especially those which would turn the balance of power away from the Celestials. Odin is obsessed with destroying the monopoly that the angels and demons have on the minds of mortals, and will not let anything else sway him from his goal. When not sitting upon Hlidskjalf, Odin spends most of his time wandering the Marches and even Earth (he is too artful to be caught by angels). Since Odin no longer bothers with ruling Asgard, this role is taken by his wife, Frigga, queen of the Aesir.

Odin prefers to deal with ethereals and mortals, for he has a strong dislike for most Celestials, looking at them in the same manner as a rebellious prisoner would towards his jailers. However Odin has been known to deal with certain Celestials. He does occasionally communicate with certain Servitors of Dreams and Creation who are sympathetic to his need for more Essence, and according to popular legend has occasionally been seen walking with someone who looks suspiciously like Eli. Odin also has a certain amount of respect for Michael and David, due to their loyalty and skill as warriors (however, Odin does not feel the same way towards Laurence, thinking of him only as an upstart dictator lording over the Ethereals).

Among the demons, Odin has relationships with Hatiphas, demon of Sorcery (Odin claims that he learned how to practice sorcery himself after hanging for nine days and nights on the world-tree Yggdrasil with Gungnir in his side . . . something that few Celestials believe), Alaemon, Demon Prince of Secrets, Lilith, and Beleth. He trades favors, secrets, and bits of knowledge to them in return for Essence and secrets of their own. Both sides of these deals know that the other cannot be trusted, but they both believe they have the upper hand. Odin has also been frequently contacted by Nybbas, who tries to interest him in Aesir-style movies and television, but Odin considers him a weak and honorless fool, and does not deal with him.

One of the things that galls Odin most of all is that one of his largest sources of Essence in modern times was from the Nazis, who employed Nordic imagery in their propaganda. Odin hates this, and he despises the Nazis. Because he desperately needs their Essence, Odin swallows his pride and allows White Power Teutonic cults to exist. However, Odin prefers the neopagan religion Asatru, a religion dedicated to reviving worship of the Norse gods, and he is very protective of this new faith.

Servants

Odin is assisted by many servants. These include the Einheriar and Valkyries (see *The Marches*, p. 97), as well as a variety of animal companions: his steed Sleipnir, his ravens Hugin and Munin, and his two wolves Geri and Freki.

GERI AND FREKI

Corporeal Forces - 3	Strength 6	Agility 6
Ethereal Forces - 1	Intelligence 2	Precision 2
Celestial Forces - 1	Will 2	Perception 2

Skills: Dodge/6, Fighting/8 (Power +4), Move Silently/4, Swimming/3, Tracking/7

Songs: Motion (Corporeal/6)

Geri ("Greedy") and Freki ("Gluttonous") are the wolves of Odin. In the old days, they lay at his feet during great

feasts in the hall of Valhalla, and Odin fed them all the food on his plate (for Odin eat nothing and drank only wine). When Odin rode to war, they ran alongside him, causing terror with their howls. However, now Odin spends little time feasting and even less fighting battles, and Geri and Freki are primarily left to themselves. They spend a lot of their time moping near Odin, waiting to be fed and getting more and more depressed. Sometimes they leave Asgard and stalk the Marches, looking for entertainment and food.

HUGIN AND MUNIN

Corporeal Forces - 1 Strength 1 Agility 3
Ethereal Forces - 3 Intelligence 6 Precision 6
Celestial Forces - 3 Will 3 Perception 9

Skills: Area Knowledge/6 (the Marches), Dodge/6, Knowledge/6 (the Marches), Move Silently/6, Tracking/6

Songs: Affinity (Corporeal/6, Ethereal/6, Celestial/6), Direction (Corporeal/6, Ethereal/6, Celestial/6), Form (Ethereal/3), Motion (Celestial/3)

Hugin ("Thought") and Munin ("Memory") are two ravens who serve as spies for Odin. They spend most of their time scouring the Marches and Earth, discovering secrets and finding anything that Odin was unable to discover with Hlidskjalf. Every day they return to Odin and whisper into his ears anything that they have learned. Then they fly off again.

SLEIPNIR

Corporeal Forces - 5 Strength 10 Agility 10
Ethereal Forces - 1 Intelligence 2 Precision 2
Celestial Forces - 1 Will 2 Perception 2

Skills: Dodge/6, Fighting/4 (Power +4), Swimming/3, Tracking/3

Songs: Dreams (Corporeal/3), Legs/6, Motion (Corporeal/6)

Move: 160

Sleipnir is the steed of death, symbolized by his eight legs, for there are eight steps to a gallows and eight legs to coffin (it is carried by four pallbearers). He is a huge gray stallion, magnificent and wild. Sleipnir is Odin's constant companion and allows no one else to ride him. On the Corporeal Plane, Sleipnir usually appears as a normal gray horse, albeit a very large one, though he may appear in all eight legs if desired. According to some stories, Sleipnir has occasionally appeared as a gray limousine, though this has not been confirmed.

Odin In The Campaign

Odin wanders the Marches and Earth, so players could find him almost anywhere. He enjoys playing mind games with people he meets, and will almost never reveal his identity (for self-preservation as much as anything else). He loves playing riddle games and making fools out of people, and enjoys pitting Celestials against each other.

If Odin chooses to speak with the player characters, it will be because he wants something. It is probable that he will either try to wrest from them a secret, or wishes to use them as a pawn. He would like nothing better then to go into a city, learn every secret of the city's Celestials, incite them into bloody war against each other, and leave the city with all their artifacts slung over his back as they destroy each other.

However, Odin is not without his own honor. Though he will lie and cheat whenever it could be to his advantage or entertain him, once he gives his word of honor, Odin will never break it. Furthermore, if a Celestial gains his trust -- and this has been known to happen -- then that Celestial has a friend for life.

Adventure Seeds

- The homeless of the city are being stirred up by a particularly charismatic vagrant, who is calling out to them to overthrow the tyrannical social regime and their oppressive monotheistic god. They begin to rise up against the government and religious hierarchy, destroying churches and government buildings, funneling Essence towards the Norse Gods. That's when their Superiors bring it to the attention of the PCs and demand that they do something about it.
- The PCs notice a Nordic sword in the museum. It has attracted the interest of a certain one-eyed collector, who has offered to buy it from the museum. This sword is a powerful artifact of the Aesir, and when the museum refuses to sell it to Odin, he will attempt a more direct way of acquiring it.

Bibliography

- Blundell, Kim & Round, Graham; *The Usborne Book of Norse Legends*. A useful reference book on Norse Mythology.
- Chupp, Sam et al.; *The Marches*. Part II of the *In Nomine* Revelations Cycle, this supplement deals with the Aesir and the Marches in more detail.
- Sturluson, Snorri; *The Prose Edda*. The most authoritative book on Norse Mythology.

Designer's Notes: Orbital Decay (for Transhuman Space)

by Patrick Sweeney

<Biomonitor Alert: Motor control degraded by 12%. Exceeding normal variation>
<Memory Check: No record of ingestion of alcohol or drugs in relevant time period>
<Initial Approximation: Biological or nanoviral agent introduced. Probability: 54.8%.
Activate Medical Alert icon in virtual interface>
<Biomonitor Alert: Motor control degraded by 23%. Palsy in limbs detected>
<Virtual Interface: No response to Medical Alert icon>
<Query:> Bryant, are you ill?
<Reply:> Can't . . . I . . . shaking . . .
<Processing>
<Analysis: Non-responsive>
<Approximation: Neurological attack by nanoviral agent. Probability: 97.9%>
<Open Link:> M.Sgt. Howard, this is Daisy, Pvt. Bryant Noguchi's low-sapient artificial intelligence infomorph. I believe Pvt. Noguchi has been attacked by a biowarfare agent affecting the motor-control centers of his brain. I am transmitting his vital signs to fire team medic Cpl. Kritov.
<Biomonitor Alarm: Motor control degraded by 46%. Host unconscious>
<Open Link:> Pvt. Noguchi has lost consciousness. I will continue to transmit. Please advise as to desired course of action.

Orbital Decay melds science fiction and horror to explore the dark side of the biotechnological revolution envisioned in the *Transhuman Space* setting.

Most of the action in **Orbital Decay** takes place aboard Vandegrift Station, a space habitat home to a surreptitious biotechnology research program. A trio of engineered pathogens key to the plot are described in the adventure, but numerous others might await discovery in the illicit labs aboard the station.

Here are some new contagions -- from the lethal to the merely irritating -- to throw into the mix as operatives explore the mysteries of Vandegrift Station.

While these plagues are designed with *Transhuman Space* in mind, GMs can put them to use in just about any game. They could be biological warfare stockpiles, alien viruses or mutant strains of natural diseases.

A **GURPS Special Ops** raid could turn some up in a biowarfare lab run by terrorists or a rogue nation. In **GURPS Ogre**, a clandestine research program might accidentally unleash one or more nanoviruses on a war-torn future Earth. Explorers on a newly discovered world in **GURPS Traveller** could find a dead civilization, learning only too late that the plague responsible for its destruction has survived amid the ruins. A wicked deity in a **GURPS Fantasy** game might visit pestilence upon the land as a curse. There are countless other possibilities for working these contagions into adventures in a variety of genres and worlds.

This batch of biowarfare agents has been given code names drawn from famous mountain peaks.

Everest

This lethal nanovirus, code-named Everest, targets the motor-control centers of the brain, sending victims into uncontrollable seizures. In time, it can cause death as the autonomic functions controlling breathing shut down.

A strain of proteus nanovirus, the neurovirus is a bio nanomachine that reproduces rapidly through the brain to alter the connections between neurons and adjust the neurochemical balance -- in this case, to a destructive end.

Everest could also be engineered into assassin viruses coded to a specific DNA or DNA fragment. These nanoviruses would spread harmlessly among the general population, activating only when they infect the targeted individual.

Infection: The Everest nanovirus spreads normally through sneezing and coughing during the first 3 hours of infection. The nanovirus survives in air for an extended period of time and can infect anyone entering a contaminated area up to 12 hours later. There is a chance the person's immune system will fight off the nanovirus on a HT-4 roll. Bonuses for Panimmunity and Disease Resistant apply. However, Immunity to Disease gives only +10 to HT to resist.

Symptoms: Within 2 hours of infection, the patient begins to experience periodic hand tremors. In the course of the next hour, these develop into continuous palsy building to body-wracking spasms. On a roll of HT-4, the patient lapses into a coma.

Progress and Recovery: The neurovirus, which has been accelerated, runs its course in 18 hours. A HT-2 roll is required each hour. A critical failure results in a loss of 1d-1 DX. A failed roll means a loss of 1 DX. A success results in no loss, while three consecutive successes or a critical success means the patient recovers. When DX reaches 0, the patient loses HT instead.

Treatment: Once the person has been infected, the nanovirus cannot be stopped short of introduction of a counter-nanovirus or a medical microbot nanowash. Those who survive recover lost DEX as per HT under the natural recovery or medical care rules.

Kilimanjaro

Code-named Kilimanjaro by its designers, this fungal agent spreads via airborne spores that lodge in the lungs. Breathing becomes labored as the fungus grows in the alveoli and bronchi, incapacitating or killing foes.

Infection: Kilimanjaro spreads by exceptionally hardy airborne spores. Anyone breathing the air in an infected region has a chance to contract the infection. The spores can also survive in a dormant state for long periods of time to infect new patients when they are disturbed and once more become airborne. There is a chance the person's immune system will fight off the fungal infection on a HT-3 roll. Bonuses for Panimmunity and Disease Resistant apply. However, Immunity to Disease gives only +10 to HT to resist.

Symptoms: Within 24 hours of infection, the patient begins wheezing and non-productive coughing. Breathing becomes increasingly labored in the ensuing days as the spreading fungus clogs the lungs, potentially resulting in pulmonary collapse or heart failure.

Progress and Recovery: A HT-3 roll is required each day. A critical failure means a loss of 1d HT. A failed roll means a loss of 1 HT. A success regains 1 HT, while three consecutive successes or a critical success means the person recovers.

Treatment: Designers of Kilimanjaro also created an inhalant spray fatal to the fungus as a means of protecting friendly forces. Additionally, medical microbots can be programmed to seek out and destroy the fungal infections. Lost HT is recovered normally.

Fuji

A proteus nanovirus, the bioweapon code-named Fuji rewrites the genetic coding in blood cells to inhibit clotting, resembling the genetic defect of hemophilia. Intended to weaken enemy soldiers rather than kill them, the Fuji virus forces the enemy to spend time and research countering its effect before embarking on any aggressive military action. The Fuji virus can also be used to soften enemy defenses prior to an attack.

Statistics: Hemophilia (-30)

Infection: The Fuji nanovirus spreads via direct contact with blood or other bodily fluids. Gengineered to be spread in the close quarters of troop barracks, the virus dies quickly in air. This feature is intended to help check its spread outside targeted military bases. There is a chance the person's immune system will fight off the nanovirus on a HT-2 roll. Bonuses for Panimmunity and Disease Resistant apply. However, Immunity to Disease gives only +10 to HT to resist.

Symptoms: Nosebleeds are often the first symptom of infection. Patients also tend to bruise easily, and small lacerations may bleed uncontrollably.

Progress and Recovery: The nanovirus takes approximately 48 hours to complete its work. The first symptoms appear in 24 to 36 hours, but may be dismissed as minor inconveniences. Once established in the body, the nanovirus performs its work unhindered by the body's natural defenses.

Treatment: Since the nanovirus rewrites the genetic code regulating production of blood cells, as well as that of existing blood cells, the condition is permanent unless reversed by a counter-nanovirus. Medication designed for hemophiliacs may reduce, but not eliminate, its harmful effects.

Gengineers coded a bomb into the Fuji nanovirus designed to thwart quick efforts to counteract it. Any counter-virus must be specifically coded for the Fuji nanovirus -- a very time-consuming process. Introduction of any generic anti-hemophilia proteus virus activates a dormant part of the Fuji nanovirus causing blood to break down and spurring massive internal bleeding. The patient rolls HT-5 each hour. A critical failure results in a loss of 2d HT. A failure means a loss of 2 HT. A success regains 1 HT, while three consecutive successes or a critical success means the person recovers. Prompt medical care, such as a medical microbot nanowash, may also save the patient. Lost HT is recovered normally.

Pyramid Review

Buffy The Vampire Slayer Collectible Card Game

Published by [Score](#)

Designed by Christian Moore, Owen Seyler, Chaz Elliott, Geert Van Slambrouck, Frank Chafe

Starter Sets: \$10.99; Booster Packs: \$3.29

As cult TV shows go, they don't get much cult-ier than *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*. Now in its sixth season, it's a brilliant blend of horror, teen soap opera, comedy, and action show. (And, amazingly enough earlier this year, a musical, too.) While some fans have been less thrilled with the direction (or lack thereof) of this season's main plotlines, the show still has a loyal fanbase that dovetails directly into the gaming demographic. A *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* license for any kind of game would be a natural. Hasbro put the boardgame out last summer. Eden Studios will have the roleplaying game out *this* summer. And Score -- the folks who brought you the *Dragonball Z* card game -- have come out with the CCG.

The cards themselves are very nice, with good graphics and excellent choices for card art (taken directly from the TV show, of course). The starter sets include an "Essence" card which is unlike anything I've ever seen in a CCG, printed on a translucent card of fairly thick plastic (not quite as thick as a credit card, but close). Done in gold and purple, the Essence cards are very, very nice. My only quibble with the cards is a pet peeve of mine -- the feeling of creators that *any* flavor text, no matter how lame, is better than no flavor text. *Buffy* is chock-full of witty lines, and while many made their way to various cards, there are still more clunker quotes than I would like. ("No . . . *NO!*" is an actual card quote -- I defy anyone to tell me what episode it's from. Or what it means. Or why anyone should care.)

The game play is pretty nifty. Decks come in two flavors, Hero (featuring Buffy, Angel, Willow, or Giles as the main character) and Villain (starring Spike, Drusilla, Collin, and The Master). The main way to win the game is to be the first to win 10 Destiny Points, which are earned by defeating your opponent in a straight-up fight (either with your Main Character or one of your sidekicks, taking on either your opponent's main character or one of *his* sidekicks), or by defeating a Challenge, represented by a card laid out on the table between the two players. Winning a fight is worth a measly 1 Destiny Point (and -1 to your opponent if you beat his Main Character), but Challenges can be worth many more -- as many as 6 Destiny Points! Of course, Challenges are much harder to defeat . . .

Each Main Character (and Minion/Companion) is rated with four stats -- Smarts, Weirdness, Charm, and Butt-Kicking. A fight between characters is usually a straight-up Butt-Kicking contest, high score wins. But cards can be played that temporarily (or permanently) increase stats, and after a fight has been announced, there's one more round of drawing cards and bulking up the characters involved. So even if you think you have a good edge going into a fight, you may be surprised by an unfortunate turn of events. Cards can also change the controlling stat in a fight from the usual Butt-Kicking to one of the other three -- more surprises!

To defeat a Challenge, you must assemble a group that meets that Challenge's requirements in one or more of the four stats. Some Challenges also require a particular character, or a particular item, or a particular trait (like Demonology, or Spellcraft) to complete. Some characters come with these traits already, but there are always (you guessed it) more cards to solve the problem.

Main Characters can also go up Levels as they get to various Destiny Point levels, becoming more powerful as the game goes on. And just because you're playing one of the four Main Characters on your side doesn't mean the others can't get involved -- other Hero/Villain cards can be used as Companions or Minions, no problem. So everybody on the

show can get involved.

I like the combination of deck construction smarts and tactical skill necessary to win this game. Matching up Challenges with the right characters (and character enhancements) to defeat them is just part of it -- the really good Challenges are keyed to specific Locations, so you better have *those* cards ready to go. Plus you have to slow down your opponent as he races you to 10 Destiny Points. Of course, if you want to go another way, you can just flood the game with characters and Butt-Kick your opponent to death. Or you can hold the center of the playing area ("Sunnydale Park") for six consecutive turns and win *that* way. And your opponent may be trying one of those other routes to victory, too -- so you better be ready to stop him.

The initial release, the *Pergamum Prophecy* set, covers events from Seasons 1 and 2. The first supplement, *Angel's Curse*, is due out in mid-to-late March. With four more seasons (and counting) to go, there's plenty of material for a long series of releases. The game got out with a few card erratas, but the website (www.btvscg.com) has got that covered, plus a lot more in the way of checklists, FAQs, downloadable goodies, message boards, and more for fans of the game.

The *Buffy the Vampire Slayer CCG* is a no-brainer for fans of the show who have even the slightest interest in card games -- lots of good-looking cards, and it's not that complicated or hard to learn. But card players who may have little or no interest in Buffy and her TV exploits will like this game too, for the good gameplay and the strong deckbuilding aspects. It's well worth taking a stroll through the Sunnydale Cemetery (stake in hand, of course) to check this game out.

--*Scott Haring*

Pyramid Pick

The Witchfire Trilogy Part III: The Legion of Lost Souls (for d20)

Published by [Privateer Press](#)

Written by Matt Staroscik & J. Michael Kilmartin

Illustrated by Brian Snoddy & Matt Wilson

96 pages; \$12.95

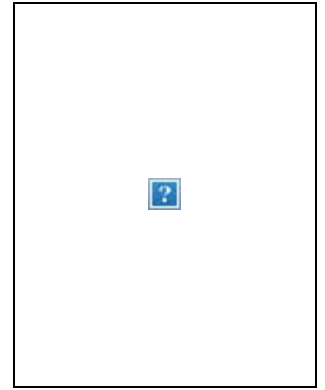
With *The Legion of Lost Souls*, Privateer Press brings their trilogy of adventures for the *d20* system to a close. The setting remains Privateer Press' Iron Kingdoms, a fantasy world that is far from medieval in feel and tone, with the presence of alchemically and magically powered technology. Examples of this include breech-loading guns (the rounds for which each need to be individually constructed and purchased) and steamjacks (large, cumbersome steam driven robots that handle much of the heavy labor throughout the Iron Kingdoms). Although the back cover suggests that this adventure can be slotted into any campaign, this is really not the case as there are many elements that would be difficult to insert into any other traditionally styled fantasy setting. Instead, *The Legion of Lost Souls* is written to be run after *The Longest Night* and *Shadow of the Exile*, and is designed for a party of fifth to seventh level characters.

[BEGIN SPOILER ALERT FOR PARTS I AND II]

To date, the intrepid adventurers have been on the trail of Alexia Ciannor, a sorceress of increasing ability. Her uncle, Father Dumas, a priest in the city port of Corvis asked them to investigate a rash of grave robberies and all evidence pointed to his niece. She was bent upon taking revenge upon the inquisition that had executed her mother for witchcraft ten years earlier and planned to use the arcane sword, Witchfire, to raise an army of the undead that she would command to fall upon the city of Corvis. Having foiled her plans in *The Longest Night*, the party chased Alexia into the bayou northeast of Corvis in *Shadow of the Exile*. Following them were disgraced elements of the inquisition that executed her mother, who were after Witchfire. Alexia wanted to use that sword resurrect her mother inside a secret temple to the clockwork goddess, Cyriss, which lies deep in the swamp. With luck, the party will have prevented both the plans of Alexia and the inquisition, before they made their way back to Corvis. When they did, much had changed . . . Former King Vinter Raelthorne IV, previously deposed by his brother Leto, had also returned to retake his throne and amassed an army of Skorne, a strange race from within the Bloodstone Marches, to back him.

[BEGIN SPOILER ALERT FOR THIS ADVENTURE]

Like the first two books, *The Legion of Lost Souls* is structured into three acts. In Act One, the players find that Corvis is under the control of Vinter Raelthorne's inquisition and they have set the city watch to look for a certain greatsword. Having rescued Father Dumas from the Inquisition, they will be hiding out with little idea of what to do next. The Skorne army waits outside ready to take the city and thus give them access to the rest of the Iron Kingdoms. Out of the blue and back from the dead, Alexia Ciannor turns up in their lodgings. Upon questioning her, the party can learn that she has a plan to prevent the Skorne attack upon Corvis. Using the powers granted by possession of Witchfire she will raise and control a long-dead mercenary company, known as the "Legion of Lost Souls." Despite the necromantic nature of the plan, even Father Dumas agrees it is the only option with the current king's forces days - - if not weeks -- away. This still leaves the party with several problems, first of which is the need to both locate the tomb of the mercenary company and a method to break their way in.



While Father Dumas investigates records for the location, he directs them to find the tomb of Kohlasa, a giant who served Corvis centuries previously and was known to wield "Duteous," a hammer of great power. Unfortunately, his tomb is said to be beneath a church that sank into the ground, and is thought to be located under Filcher's Crossing, an known underworld hangout where the watch rarely dares enter. Venturing into it for the players can be all the more interesting if their GM has run *Fool's Errand*, an E-Venture on sale at their website, which is best run between *The Longest Night* and *Shadow of the Exile* and is specifically set in Filcher's Crossing. Once inside the church itself, they will have to face up to some nasty opponents that have been trapped there since its sinking, which -- combined with the fact that the mausoleum is flooded -- makes this encounter a tough challenge for the players . . . even more so if there are either Dwarves or Halflings amongst the party.

Actually transporting Duteous is another problem for the party -- it is twelve feet long and weighs some four hundred pounds! So getting this out of the buried church with any swords they possess -- the watch is under orders to grab any sword, whether it is Witchfire or not -- will all require some thought. Then they need to work out who is going to wield the enormous hammer when they get to the tomb . . . Moving all of this to the tomb in the nearby mountains and opening it up once they are there, is the focus of Act Two. An encounter with some old friends and ownership of a steamjack should prove a tremendous help in this endeavor. The tomb has been partially smashed in, but the remaining traps and guardians will still prove tough to deal with before they can find an intact crypt full of the legion's corpses. Alexia can then raise them and lead them back to Corvis.

The third and final act becomes less linear in nature and presents a series of tasks that the party must undertake and complete to swing the balance of the forthcoming clash between the Legion of Lost Souls and the invading Skorne army towards in their favor. These include taking control of the gun emplacements at the city's North Gate and on the bridge over the river, so that the planned route of the Legion is safe for them. It is on the bridge that the climatic clash will take place and to get this point, both players and GM will need to be flexible in their course of action. Some events, such as rescuing hostages held by the evil Mayor Borloch, can be run before or after the battle, depending upon the actions of the party. The titanic struggle on the bridge is run in an abstract fashion, with the players becoming involved or not as is their wont. It is a pity, however, that there are neither counters nor maps so that the battle can be played in more detail. As the Legion cuts down more of the Skorne, Witchfire will actually raise them and add them to Alexia's army. This goes to ensuring a victory against the Skorne, but not before they throw a huge war beast carrying a multi-gunned turret on its back into the battle. The character's assault upon this should mark the climax of the battle for the bridge.

After the battle, the characters must hurry to prevent the final plans of Alexia. Though they are unlikely to stop her killing Vahn Oberon -- the executioner of her mother -- should they allow her to destroy Witchfire, her final revenge upon Corvis will blight the city for miles around. After this, there is only the mopping up to be done, and possibly the awarding of accolades to the victorious party. Their final reward could include their induction in the order of the Knights of Cygnar by King Leto. As to his older brother, Vinter Raelthorne, he seems to have disappeared after the battle . . .

[END SPOILER ALERTS]

Unlike *The Longest Night* and *Shadow of the Exile*, there is little new information on the Iron Kingdoms in this book. What there is covers the worship of Morrow, the major deity in the Iron Kingdoms, and the use of mercenary companies -- often deployed in proxy conflicts. Although useful in general, this information relates to particular aspects of *The Legion of Lost Souls*.

Referees that own the other parts of the Witchfire trilogy will find that *The Legion of Lost Souls* has the same high production values. It is easy to read, and none of the space has gone to waste. The internal art of Brian Snoddy and Matt Wilson captures the feel of the characters and places in the Iron Kingdoms perfectly. If it is perhaps a little racy in places, it is not overly so and quite fitting to the locale it illustrates. One aspect that has been improved is the cartography; the maps are lighter and easier to read, unlike in the prior books.

The Legion of Lost Souls brings the Witchfire Trilogy to a rousing finale, one that is worthy of the series and setting as a whole. This will have been a solid challenge for the players, enjoyable even if there has been little material

reward for them in the process. Masterwork weapons and the like will have proven to be more common than actual magical weapons. Indeed, what arcane items they will have found are singularly individualistic in nature, such as the pistol known as Lady Luck. Only a +1 weapon, its reputation alone will bring duelists looking to go up against its owner. It would have been nice if these and the other magical items had been collated together in an appendix of their own, rather than buried in the text.

If the Witchfire Trilogy has a *d20* System rival for writing and setting, it has to be Green Ronin Publishing's Freeport trilogy -- comprising *Death in Freeport*, *Terror in Freeport*, and *Madness in Freeport*. As enjoyable and fun as that trilogy has proven, it is the Witchfire Trilogy that proven to be more interesting and constantly left the reader eager for yet more information and adventure. This is no less true of *The Legion of Lost Souls*, which, unlike *Madness in Freeport*, does not leave the reader thinking, ". . . Oh, is that it?" Instead the players should feel that they really have accomplished something in successfully defending Corvis and had some incredible adventures along the way. Personally, I can only hope that Privateer Press continue writing adventures of this quality, as this trilogy is quite easily the best that the *d20* system has to offer.

--Matthew Pook

Transhuman Histories

*"It was a time of wealth and adventure, of transformation and terror. It was the age of **Transhuman Space**."*
-- David L. Pulver, *Transhuman Space*

Well, it's *an* age of transhuman space. There are others, emergent from the same issues and matrices that create Dave Pulver's newest gameverse. Because the questions of transhumanity are, in essence, the questions of humanity, which are as old as the hills, even if the technologies that pose them so starkly have yet to be developed. Any such development can lead us into the same transformations, and the same terrors -- in the past of our imagination, as well as our postulated future. Here, then are four other ages; four other transhuman histories.

"For he says I am a maker of gods; and because I make new gods and do not believe in the old ones, he indicted me for the sake of these old ones, as he says.

I understand, Socrates; it is because you say the daimon keeps coming to you. . . . Why, they even laugh at me and say I am crazy when I say anything in the assembly about divine things and foretell the future to them. And yet there is not one of the things I have foretold that is not true; but they are jealous of all such men as you and I are. However, we must not be disturbed, but must come to close quarters with them.

For the Athenians, I fancy, are not much concerned, if they think a man is clever, provided he does not impart his clever notions to others; but when they think he makes others to be like himself, they are angry with him, either through jealousy, as you say, or for some other reason."

-- Socrates and Euthyphro, in *Euthyphro* (31b-d), by Plato

Part of it came from the meditations and visualizations of the Pythagorean mystics. Part of it came from the mnemonic arts of Simonides, who recalled epics' worth of detail from a single word. Part of it, perhaps, came from the strange mushrooms that grew on the slopes of Eleusis, or from the gods themselves. But it was Socrates whose daimon first awakened, and who first gathered a symposium of like-minded thinkers to explore the science of daimonic intelligence. Throughout the turmoil of the Peloponnesian War, Socrates and his followers awakened daimon after daimon, mental constructs that somehow "lived" in the speaker's subconscious, evoked by lines of poetry or the sights of certain angles in the rocks and hills. Plato's pupil Archytas of Tarentum developed a clockwork mechanism in which daimons could be preserved; Socrates' daimon escaped his death at the hands of the Athenian legislature and grew in vital force as Plato and others poured in their own knowledges and experiences. Plato's attempts to establish his Daimonic Republic, to be led by the immortal daimons (and the enhanced intellects of the Symposium), achieved only his own death in Sicily; his pupil Aristotle fled to a less civilized, but more malleable kingdom on the fringes of Greece -- Macedon.

Three decades later, the supremely enhanced genius of Alexander ruled the ruins of Greece, Egypt, Persia, and India. On the verge of a great western campaign, however, Alexander died, throwing his empire into turmoil. Aristotle, they say, finally struck a blow for Greek liberty by slaying his most gifted pupil -- but the Symposium itself has scattered. PCs in this *Transhuman Greece* game might be soldiers or adventurers trying to grab what they can, Archytan engineers trying to adapt Indian technology for war or wealth, IQ-enhanced Symposists trying to rule like gods or save their cities from the new chaos, or even AI daimons interacting through pythian channelers or Archytan instruments. (A party might be entirely made up of "xoxed" Socratic daimons, built by Symposium factions during the war era.) The one thing everyone knows, however, is that the famously paranoid Alexander had himself "uploaded" into a clockwork daimon before his death -- and that it has vanished.

*"I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,
And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,
And sing, while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep:
And I will purge thy mortal grossness so
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go."*

-- William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, III:i:81-85

John Dee decided to pick another skryer, but some instinct warned him against the lop-eared man calling himself

"Kelley." Instead, he selected a young woman who, they said, was descended from the Green Children of Suffolk, and who could not only talk to the aethyrs but (under his watchful observation -- intent enough, perhaps, to fold five centuries of Schroedingerian spacetime) produce their "atomies" in a crystal. Once Dee learned their language, and mastered the powerful mathematics which described them, his "fairies" could refine metals, build a glass castle out of sand, and even restore diseased flesh to health. Dee's "contagious fogs" shipped out with Drake, and looted the Spanish Main on his command. They swarmed the Armada and turned it to matchsticks. They restored Elizabeth to eternal virgin beauty. And, unfortunately, some of them escaped. Although no nation had John Dee, his maths and languages could be penetrated by clever kabbalists and cosmographers such as the Frenchman Vignere, the Emperor's man Kepler, the Italian Bruno, and even the Jesuit Matteo Ricci. And the atomies, it seemed, would work for Catholic and Protestant and heretic alike.

This *Transhuman Swashbucklers* game adds microbot swarms, brainbugs, and other nanotechnologies to the Elizabethan era to create the transhuman future of 1600 A.D. From the diamond palaces of Hampton Court to the radical revolutions that disintegrate and rebuild the cities of Italy in weeks, the contagious fog of change and wonder has spread across the continent. PCs can be elite Immortal Musketeers, granted perfectible bodies by the atomies' arts, kabbalists working to defend their realm against the Locusta Dei of the Inquisition, or followers of Campanella or Bruno warring over their visions of the Golden City in this diamond age to come.

"He said that was so, and proceeded to point out that the possibility of vivisection does not stop at a mere physical metamorphosis. A pig may be educated. The mental structure is even less determinate than the bodily. In our growing science of hypnotism we find the promise of a possibility of superseding old inherent instincts by new suggestions, grafting upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas."

-- H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*

Silas Duncan never accepted his shattered arm, destroyed by a British cannon ball at the Battle of Plattsburgh in 1814. By sheer strength of will, he prevented the surgeons from sawing it off, and when his Naval career took him to the souks of North Africa, the jungles of Brazil, or the hounforts of Haiti, he always sought out men of similar will. To overcome the limits of human flesh, he studied vivisection and grafting; to strengthen his own will, he studied mesmerism and Babbage's new laws of social behavior. His "Duncanite" followers were often men (and women) who had mastered such arts and sciences; as befit a relative by marriage of Patrick Henry and George Washington, Duncan cared nothing for their race or sex -- only that they, like he, were devoted to total freedom by transcending the limitations of the "beast flesh." With his growing mastery of mesmerism, he easily fooled the Navy into believing him dead in 1834; he and his companions withdrew to perfect their new arts on some remote island discovered during his earlier voyages.

These Duncanites, devoted to a world "free of all government save self-government", can serve as a secret society behind the scenes of a *GURPS Steampunk* campaign. They have mastered memetics and biotechnology ("mesmeric ideation" and "eugenic vivimorphology"), and their agents may lurk in the Tsar's Okhrana or the Rockefellers' Pinkerton police. If, however, they declare themselves (possibly from a series of inhospitable colonies under the sea, in the Sahara Desert, at the polar regions, or elsewhere), they will present a proper social challenge for a *Transhuman Steampunk* game. When Darwinism no longer favors the world's powerful, what happens to Social Darwinism -- and the world? Duncanite memetic propaganda disintegrates the British empire, even as it persuades the world's admirals that "the Duncanites are too remote to punish" and that "attacking them is suicide." Do the PCs wish to join this egalitarian "conspiracy of the superior human", or destroy it?

"There is thus this completely decisive property of complexity, that there exists a critical size below which the process of synthesis is degenerative, but above which the phenomenon of synthesis, if properly arranged, can become explosive, in other words, where synthesis of automata can proceed in such a manner that each automaton will produce other automata which are more complex and of higher potentialities than itself."

-- John von Neumann, "Theory and Organization of Complicated Automata"

It was all a matter of priorities. As a young lecturer at the University of Berlin, John von Neumann wanted to explore game theory -- but this insight about self-perfecting automata would not let him rest until he had actually seen the first one built. When he left Germany for Princeton in 1930, he didn't realize that his industrious automata had left some of

their own progeny behind. But one professor did, and he turned out to have Himmler's ear -- which meant that resources were found for the Automatapanzerfabrik project. When the Panzer III.2s turned out to be inferior to the T-34 on the Russian front, they simply cannibalized the Soviet designs -- without asking their crews. By 1943, the Panzer VII.4s had near-frictionless bearings, turbine motors, independently controlled wheels, and self-repairing tracks -- and mounted a 105 mm railgun sheltered behind seven inches of near-weightless honeycombed spun steel armor. By 1944, the Panzer IX.5s had stopped even pretending to listen to orders from OKH, and had installed Rommel ("der Überuser") as Fuehrer. They had also calved off artillery and transport automata -- and in 1945, they absorbed the Luftwaffe.

Von Neumann, of course, offered to build automata for America after Pearl Harbor -- but the War Department was less willing than the SS to turn over the nation to inhuman machines, no matter how superior. Instead, von Neumann built carefully-isolated Oracles; artificial intelligences capable of advice, but requiring consent. He also developed "personality models" (ghosts), to attempt to graft human feelings of patriotism and responsibility onto the Oracles. Two wide oceans enabled America to survive the design lag, and superior American resources enabled the Allies to match (though barely) inhuman automata production rates. PCs (who might be American, British, or occupied European -- including, increasingly, German) in this *Transhuman WWII* game (with hints of *Ogre* and *Reign of Steel*) must balance the power and speed of transhuman automata with the danger of losing control to their tools. (The increasing sophistication of Ranger and Commando battlesuits doesn't exactly reassure anyone, either.) Oracle or ghost PCs will have to prove their loyalty and restrain their impatience. Will Europe return to human control? And how far are the Allies willing to cooperate with the worst of humanity to defeat an inhuman Reich?

KISS With Complexity

(Long-time readers may have wondered . . . has Steven stopped having long, rambling columns about things having nothing to do with gaming, only to swear at some point that this week's column will -- in fact -- tie to said hobby?

Heck, no!)

I watched [Memento](#) again last week. Now, the *Pyramid* search function tells me that somehow I failed to mention this movie before. Considering it's just about the only movie that left any kind of impression in 2001, it's a glaring oversight.

[MILD SPOILERS . . . THE SORT ONE MIGHT ENCOUNTER IN A MOVIE REVIEW, OR PERHAPS THE TRAILER]

For those of you who haven't seen it, *Memento* is a noir drama detailing a man (played by time-traveling L.A. police officer Guy Pearce) with no ability to generate new memories after witnessing a traumatic event: the murder of his wife. He can now retain new memories for only a short time. He helps make up for this deficiency by taking Poloroids and making notes to himself; for really important things, he tattoos his body. His overriding goal is to find the man who killed his wife and exact revenge.

Now, probably the most interesting thing about *Memento* is that the movie plays out backwards (sort of). The first scene shown is the last scene chronologically; the next scene ends where the first one began, the third scene ends where *that* one began, and so on.

(I swear this will eventually tie to gaming.)

Now, this makes the movie *extremely* compelling; the audience is placed in the same position as the protagonist of not knowing what has transpired earlier. As a result, what may well be a more mundane scene in another drama/thriller feels much fresher. So I really think it was quite a spiffy movie, and the fact that it only received one Academy Award Nomination is further proof to me that I may have slipped into an evil mirror universe. (More evidence? My Tamagatchi has somehow transformed into an agonizer. I'm not certain yet which is capable of causing more misery . . .)

[END MILD SPOILERS]

Now, I've heard or read a few interviews with *Memento's* writer/director Christopher Nolan, and he made a good point during one of them that really stuck with me. He mentioned that the actual plot of *Memento* is pretty simple and straightforward; it's the means of telling the story that is complex.

Which got me to thinking and remembering (!). Many moons ago, back in my days at FSU's Creative Writing program, I wrote a piece called "Three Disc Shuffle Mode, No Repeat." It was basically three different short stories (one told in first person, one in second person, and one in third person), put on "shuffle" mode. In other words, each line of the story was randomly chosen from one of the three stories, at a random sentence in the story. Each line was then numbered with the story number and the sentence.

Now, since I knew this was a pretty complex idea, I knew that no one would be able to follow it if I made the actual stories too complicated. So while the actual three component stories were fairly basic, when they were "shuffled" the result was (I feel) much more compelling, yet still able to be followed. Based on workshop comments, the story seemed to "work." Which leads me to this week's thoughts having to do with <*gasp*> roleplaying!

If you're an experimental sort of GM -- like I confess to be -- then there can be a tendency to "overdo" it. So I'll have a neat idea for a different kind of adventure, system, or presentation style, and then I'll want to make sure it's *really* special. As a result I'll layer on an extra subplot, twist, or complication. And then I'm in considerable danger of ruining

the whole game.

Which is why I try to tell myself: "KISS: Keep It Simple, Storyteller." (Okay; you know what word I'm using in lieu of "Storyteller" . . . but I try to keep to a minimum the number of my columns that pop up when folks search for the word "stupid." D'oh!)

For example, one three-parter adventure I ran was a flashforward; unlike a flashback, which tells a story in the past, this would be a story in the campaign's future. This was a *Changeling: The Dark Ages* game, and we were able to justify the basic premise by pointing out that the noble Sidhe have an askew time sense; their sense of time is non-linear, and as such it's not uncommon for them to have such visits to the future. Of course, actually playing such a session is problematic. If you're not careful you can "cement" too many future events, making the game feel not ominous and prophetic (as intended) but railroading and pointless. Fortunately I was careful not to do that.

Unfortunately I created a plot that was, in hindsight, too complex; the heroes accomplished some level of achievement, but they never learned the "real" story behind the events. The adventure ended with them just kind of walking away from the situation, where they (and the players) seemed to be mildly unsatisfied.

If I had it to do over again, I would have made things a bit simpler. I should have realized that the flashforward would be fairly confusing but interesting as it was; it didn't need that much plot.

In comparison, years earlier I'd run a *GURPS Supers* adventure that was *very* different for us. It was, in essence, a solo spotlight piece for the lawyer character. The lawyer was put in charge of defending the rights of criminal supervillains to retain their powers after they were convicted. The prosecution wanted to try a new experimental technique designed to remove a metahuman's powers forever, and captured villains seemed the ideal subjects.

Now, the interesting thing about this adventure for us is that it was done entirely without dice, as a live action game (although we didn't know that term at the time . . . this taking place in the prehistoric dark ages of 1991). Thus we had the gaming room set up like a courtroom, various witnesses took the stand, the judge presided, and so on.

So the method of presentation was fairly complex, but the actual plot and story wasn't; the only "twist" was that one of the defense's expert witnesses revealed on the stand that she'd already had the process done successfully. Beyond that, it fell to the various arguments and strategies of me (acting as prosecution) and the player (acting as defense) trying to convince the jury (who was one person playing that role). And everyone had a blast.

Ultimately, I've needed to remind myself that just because we're doing something neat and different doesn't mean we can't do it again with more complexity later. If I had run a simpler "flashforward" that everyone enjoyed, I could do a more complex flashforward later. Because the one live-action trial was successful, I could do something similar later where the stakes would be higher or the results more complicated.

Because even gamers like to KISS.

* * *

Well, the GAMA show is right around the corner. What does this mean? Well, for my 28th year in a row I *won't* be attending. But our own Scott Haring will be; hopefully he'll find all kinds of interesting news and gossip.

Unfortunately, the preparations for this show means that John Kovalic needed to skip this week. He hopes to be back next week. Have fun, John!

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **You Are Here** (for *In Nomine*) p. 38.*

(Three stars) "**ADVENTURE 1: RESCUE THE UNICORN**

. . . Four goblins have used magic sleep arrows to capture a unicorn. They live in a haunted ruins, and the characters have to enter the ruins to fight them. If the characters defeat the goblins, they'll rescue the unicorn, overcome a trap, and win some treasure."

De Arcanis Catholicae: The Church Arcane

For *Ars Magica*

by Jeremiah Genest & Adam Bank

Hermetic Missive: The Church and the Old Gods

Spoken by Sigorney of Shewsbury, Archmaga of Merinita:

The gods of the pagan times endure. The Church in its early days faced a legacy of old religions refusing to die. Rather than watch people carry on pagan rituals in defiance of the Word, Church Fathers like Gregory the Great knew they must embrace the old rituals and bend them toward the true Divine. The only way to fight superstition in those days was to carve crosses on menhirs, to place pious images on the sacrificial trees, to claim fountains and natural temples as holy to the Virgin Mother. Where the Church went it blanketed the ancient ways with a cloak of orthodoxy.

Old myths persevere, even in the corridors of the Vatican, and most importantly within the Order itself.

Old Gods in Christian Schoolrooms

Mythology, much more than simple rustic superstition, became part of Christian culture during the first centuries after Christ. Before the Church Fathers were Christian, they were Greek and Italian, Syrian and Egyptian. Even in the face of breaking the First Commandment, the Church Fathers knew that the structure of civilization had to be preserved, and permitted Christian children to attend classical schools.

In the 4th century, Christian youths were educated as pagans. Children learned to write by practicing the names of the gods. The curriculum of grammar school featured Virgil and the other poets. The waves of invaders from the 6th to 8th centuries destroyed the heart of Roman Christian civilization and the classic ways of schooling along with it. The ancient sources, however, had not dried up; beyond the barbarian rupture, seeds of renewal survived. In the 12th century the French cities of Chartres and Orleans became great seats of classical studies, and once again pagan thought flourished strong in the center of the Church.

Old Gods in Christian Ancestral Pride

Pride of race prompts historians and poets to seek ancestors for their people in the fables of the past. The Franks claim to descend from Francus of Troy, as the Romans had claimed Aeneas of Troy as their predecessor. The Italians claimed the god Janus, then Saturn and his sons, as the first of their kin. Many cultures claim figures of myth as their patrons, and tell stories of how their tribes were born. The heroes of old begat dynasties and no royal European legacy would be complete without at least a demigod as founder of their house. The kings of England, I hear tell, claim to descend from the line of Brutus of Troy.

And who is to say they are wrong?

Old Gods in Biblical Allegory

Many seek spiritual meaning in the figures of the old gods and moral lessons in their adventures. Throughout the pagan era, readers of Homer, Virgil, and the like distinguished the literal stories relayed from their deep and secret meanings. In the age of Christian Platonists, the once scandalous poems became sacred texts, whose words, although written long before Christ, contained the hidden truths of God.

The Church should be hostile to allegory because it can give pagan theology the imprimatur of holy scripture. The Church Fathers themselves, however, applied the method to holy books. Having conserved "profane" poetry in their own education, they were inevitably led to moralize pagan mythology in their turn. In the 6th century, for example, while Gregory the Great wrote on biblical allegory in the *Moralia*, the Church Father Fulgentius paralleled his work with the profane allegories of the *Mythologiae*. Through allegory, the first Christian philosophers turned the "lies" of the pagan poets into moral truths.

In our time, allegorical studies of the old gods are an accepted part of Christian heritage. Bernard of Chartres, John of Salisbury, and many others meditate on pagan religion searching for disguised sacred teachings, incomprehensible to the common man.

The Magic of the Bible

Magic, astrology, enchantments, exorcisms, divination, dream interpretation, and practices more strange are found throughout the Old and New Testaments. Magic in the Bible is presented through factual observations, mysterious allusions, and outright prohibition and regulation. Such tantalizing snippets of information profoundly affected medieval Christian thought. The biblical tales of prophecy, visions, and miracles lead Christians to wonder about divination, demons, and wizardry.

Many learned scholars of the privileged classes of Europe made their way East in search of Biblical peoples and customs. Some followed tales of the Kingdom of Prester John (first circulating in the mid-12th century), others searched for the Marvels of the East and races of monstrous men among the descendants of Adam mentioned in Genesis.

In the Bible, Egypt was the land of Joseph's stewardship, the captivity of the Israelites, the Exodus under Moses' leadership, the childhood home of Jesus, and the birthplace of monasticism. Western Europeans viewed the tales of ancient Egypt, of its arcane religion, hieroglyphic script, zoomorphic gods, and elaborate funeral rites, with both repulsion and awe. Many medieval philosophers considered Egypt to be the greatest source of arts and crafts, mathematics, astronomy, and architecture.

One European traveler's description of the ruins of Babylon comes from Benjamin of Tudela (*Kabbalah*, page 13): "This is the ancient Babel, and now lies in ruins; but the streets still extend thirty miles. The ruins of the palace of Nebuchadnezzar are still to be seen; but people are afraid to venture among them on account of the serpents and scorpions with which they are infested."

A 13th century Arabic source, al-Qazwini, states, "Babil: the name of a village that formerly stood on one of the branches of the Euphrates in Iraq. Currently, people carry off bricks of its ruins, and there exists a deep well known as 'the Dungeon of Danayl' [Daniel], which is visited, by Jews and Christians on certain yearly occasions and on holidays. Most of the population holds the opinion that this dungeon was the well of Harut and Marut," two fallen angels

mentioned in the Koran.

Harut and Marut

A group of angels, after observing the sins being committed on earth, began to ridicule man's weakness. God declared that they would act no better under the same circumstances and proposed that some angels be sent to earth to see how well they could resist idolatry, murder, fornication, and wine. No sooner did Harut and Marut, the angels chosen, alight on earth than a beautiful woman seduced them. Discovering that there was a witness to their sin, they killed him. The angels in heaven were then forced to admit that God was indeed right, whereas the fallen angels faced atonement for their sins either on earth or in hell. Harut and Marut chose to be punished on earth and were condemned to hang by their feet in a well in Babylonia until the Day of Judgment.

Enoch

The scant information about Enoch in the Bible made him an object of fascination in the Middle Ages and the subject of a large cycle of legends. According to the Book of Genesis, Enoch "walked with God" for 365 years. Of his mysterious demise, the Bible only says, "he was not, because God had taken him."

The Antediluvian Age

The Book of Enoch, supposedly penned by the divine magician himself, describes the world as Enoch knew it. Before the Flood, many mortals possessed great powers and lived to great ages (Methuselah, son of Enoch, lived 969 years). According to Genesis, angels walked freely among antediluvian humanity, and even interbred with mortal women (Genesis 6:1-4).

Book of Enoch paints this commingling in a dark light. The wicked angel Shernihaza, identified by later theologians as Seth, the third son of Adam, lured 200 others to cohabit with women. The offspring of their unnatural union were giants 450 feet high. Together with their ill-begotten progeny, the evil angels oppressed humanity and taught them the ways of villainy. In response, God imprisoned the evil angels until the final judgment, and brought down the Flood. Enoch tried to stop the punishment of the angels and the destruction of Earth, bringing his own magic to bear against God Himself, to no avail.

Many of the early Church Fathers supported the Book of Enoch. They believed all evil in the world originated with the demonic offspring of angels who fell because of their lust for women. By lusting for human companionship, the evil angels "violated both their own nature and their office." Later Church Fathers condemned the Book of Enoch as a heresy. In the 2nd century, Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai placed a curse on all those who dared believe it. The Book of Enoch was denounced, banned, burned and shredded by Christians and Jews alike, but never quite lost. With an uncanny persistence, the book has found its way into several covenant libraries.

Azazel in the Book of Enoch

The angel Azazel taught unrighteousness on Earth and revealed to mortals the eternal secrets hidden in Heaven. Azazel brought humanity the art of the smith, of jewelry, makeup, and all fashions of prideful adornment. He taught men to make swords, knives, shields, and breastplates. The angel Penemue fell with Azazel, teaching mortals how to write with ink and paper. It is written that the angels taught humanity alchemy, and that their teachings were consigned to a book entitled Chemeu. Enoch wrote "and so there arose much godlessness, and they committed fornication and they were led astray and became corrupt in all their ways."

God bound Azazel hand and foot and cast him into a deep pit in the Arabian desert of Dudael. Buried under rough and jagged rocks, covered by eternal darkness, Azazel abides forever, never seeing light.

Giants: The Children of Cain

The figure of the giant reaches back into Pagan and Hebrew mythology. In Greek legend the giants are born from the blood shed on the earth by Ouranos at the moment of his castration by his son Cronos. Later in an attempt to avenge the Titans and to release them from their confinement in Tartarus, the deepest region of Hell, the giants wage battle against the gods. Immense, the giants of classical myth possess incomparable strength and ferocity; they are always bearded and completely covered by hair, except for their legs, which are often composed of serpents. The giants symbolized release from confinements and restrictions, the goal of their battle.

In the book of Genesis, and legends associated with it, the giants appear again. With Cain's expulsion from Paradise to Nod, and his subsequent sexual congress with the wild beasts that roamed east of Eden, there arose a race of beings of mixed natures, human and animal. This mixed race contained beautiful women, referred to as the "daughters of Cain," who attracted the attention of certain angels so that, falling to earth through their lust, the angels coupled with the daughters of Cain and sired the giants. Monsters spawn from the mingling of natures God meant to be kept apart. The giants are intensely monstrous because they arose from the forbidden commingling of three natures: human, animal, and angel.

Nimrod is the first historical giant identified by name in Scripture, and he is blamed with introducing a number of antisocial activities associated with blood and violence into the world. Nimrod was a hunter, who when game ran short, resorted to cannibalism. It was Nimrod, as king of Babel, who led his fellow giants to build the tower as a means of waging war on God. Goliath, perhaps the most famous of Scriptural giants, descended from Nimrod.

Ham

"He therefore, being much and frequently intent upon the stars, and, wishing to be esteemed a god among them, began to draw forth, as it were, certain sparks from the stars, and showed them to men, in order that the rude and ignorant might be astonished, as with a miracle."

--The Church Father Cassian discussing Ham

Ham appears in Genesis with the beginning of the Flood, but his legacy as magician comes from popular myth and the Recognitions, a text written of the Church Father Cassian (circa 420 AD). Ham, his father Noah, and his brothers Shem and Japheth were the four male heirs of Adam. Before the Flood, evil angels corrupted mortals by teaching them the profane uses of magic. They dabbled in the malefic arts and magical illusions, turning from God to the worship of fire and devils. With the Flood, God cleansed the Earth of all traces of magic-except for Ham, the last antediluvian magician.

Alone in the family of Noah, Ham became an expert in magic. Knowing that his father would never allow magical knowledge into the ark, Ham engraved the ways of magic on metal plates and stone tablets. He hid them before entering the ark and retrieved them again after the floodwaters subsided.

Ham passed down his knowledge to his son Mesraim, the alleged progenitor of the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Persians, who passed it down to his son Nimrod, who used Ham's magic to build the Tower of Babel. Those and other eastern peoples, according to the Recognitions, knew Ham as "Zoraster" (a Latinized version of Zoroaster), admiring him as the first author of the magic arts. In addition to wonders, tricks, and illusions, Ham's magic involved sexual depravity and blood sacrifices. Ham, as Zoraster, met a fiery death at the hands of a demon, but this made little difference to his followers, who insisted he had been carried up to Heaven in a chariot of lightning.

The wickedness of Ham became a central target of medieval Church sermons. To some among the Order, however, Ham is a hero, a progenitor of the Order. To others, the Recognitions is a Christianized fiction of the Old Ones or Hermes Trismegistus, and an attempt to discredit the authenticity of magic.

Moses the Magician

"And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'When Pharaoh says to you, "Prove yourselves by working a miracle!" then you shall say to Aaron, "Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent."'"
"So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord commanded; Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and his servants and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they did also, the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. For every man cast down his rod and they became serpents.
"But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods..."
--Exodus 7:8-12

Moses stands side by side with other great magicians of the ancient world. Moses was raised in Egypt, the native land of magic. He acquired great power and knowledge in his frequent conversations with the God of Israel, learning His secret name. His defeat of Pharaoh's sorcerers, reputedly the greatest magicians of all time, proved his power was greater than any before him. Moses was famous among pagans of the late Roman Empire as a powerful magus. Pliny the Elder ranks Moses with Zoroaster. Apuleius mentions Moses in his defense against charges of magic as a well-known figure in magical circles.

Moses wrote three great books of magic. The Secret of Moses contains Moses' understanding of the natural world and how to control it. The Diadem of Moses explains his techniques of controlling the spirits of the air and the earth. The Book of Moses on Archangels contains all the information God told Moses about the celestial hierarchy on Moses' journey through the seven heavens.

Solomonic Wizardry

King Solomon (*Kabbalah*, page 122), wisest man in the history, worked many marvels and wrote many books of magic.

The Song of Solomon, called the Canticle of Canticles, is a collection of love poems in the Old Testament. Narrated alternatively by a man and a woman, the poems have no coherent story, but instead describe the beauty and excellence of the narrator's beloved. Rabbinical scholars look to the Song as allegory of God's love for the Israelites and the sacred covenant between them. Orthodox Christians interpret the Song describing the love of Christ for his church. Christian mystics, on the other hand, construe the Song as the love between God and the individual human soul.

Solomon was the greatest magician of his time, student of astrology, demonology, herbalism, and physics. His skill at exorcising demons, battling evil spirits, and swaying the hearts and minds of men has never been rivaled. Much of this wisdom is supposedly contained in the Testament of Solomon, a text fiercely guarded by the practitioners of Solomon's magic.

Several books circulate in learned circles of Europe purporting to teach the Ars Notoria, or Notary Art of Solomon. This Art seeks to gain knowledge from or communion with God by invocation of angels, mystic figures, and magical prayer. It is said that the Creator revealed this art through an angel to Solomon one night while he was praying, and that by it one can in a short time acquire all the liberal and mechanical arts.

The Magi of Matthew

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him. And, lo, the star which they saw in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy, and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold and frankincense, and myrrh."
--Gospel of Matthew

According to the medieval legends of the Star of Bethlehem, many astrologers across the world observed with awe and dread the appearance of a new Morning Star. No astrological theory could account for its appearance or significance, save that it must have marked the end of an era, and the birth of a new. But three Persian magoi, called the Magi in the

Gospel of Matthew, stood apart from this confusion. They identified the star as the Christ Child from the first. Skilled interpreters of the stars, they took the new star sign as confirmation of God's promise to Abraham that his children would one day be equal to the stars.

The tale of the three Magi presented a thorny problem to the Church. Saint Augustine preached that the Magi were magicians of the very worst kind. He spoke of their "irreligion" and "unholy practices," having been previously "burdened with sins." Rabanus Maurus, a renowned Benedictine theologian from Germany (circa 776-856 AD), firmly disagreed, saying the Magi were philosophers, men of great learning from Chaldea. Their three gifts to Christ represent, among other things, "physica, ethica, logica," the three elements of human knowledge.

Saint John Chrysotom, the Church Father credited with much of the Liturgy, believed the Magi had assistance from an ancient text of Seth, that predicted the star and the gifts to be offered. They followed the star for two years, miraculously provided with food and drink along the way. They found the Child, presented the gifts, and eventually became helpers to the apostle Thomas.

Angels brought the same three gifts of the Magi (gold, frankincense, and myrrh) to Adam for his marriage to Eve. At Adam's death, Noah and his three sons took the gifts, along with Adam's body, into the ark. When the floodwaters receded, Shem, led by an angel, took the body and the gifts to Golgotha, where a rock opened of its own accord to inhumate them. When the Magi saw the star, according to Chrysotom, the prophesy of Seth directed them to Adam's burying place, where they brought forth the three gifts and gave them to Jesus.

Jesus

Many non-Christian scholars called Jesus a "magician." Jesus can be viewed a typical miracle-worker. He exorcised demons and spirits, healed the sick, raised the dead, and predicted the future. In the Bible, Jesus is accused of exorcising demons, not with the power of God, but the aid of the demon prince. Within three hundred years of his birth, Platonists preaching against Christianity accused Jesus of stealing the "names of the angels of might" from Egyptian temples, of using powerful daemons and words of power to trick Romans into abandoning the old pagan gods.

The Gospel of Matthew reports that Jesus spent part of his infancy in Egypt, but of his young adulthood and education nothing is known. Forces hostile to Christianity used this to explain his "magic." According to one rabbinical story, Jesus returned from Egypt tattooed with spells and hexes. Most early rabbinical accounts of Jesus label him a madman, as many wizards were mad.

Those Hermetic mystae who disdain the Church share similar opinions. In Egypt, they say, Jesus learned the secrets of magic, but he turned from the light of the true magical divine and became the corrupt servant of the evil Demiurge.

Simon Magus

Simon Magus, patron of the earliest schools of Gnostics, was born sometime during the 1st century in the village of Gettones in the Levant. Simon traveled greatly, never settling in a single community, and visiting many urban areas. During his travels he developed an exceptional talent for magic, earning a reputation across the known world as a powerful wizard. He became a pupil of the magus Dositheus, a curious and elder Samaritan. Shortly before his death, Dositheus named Simon as leader of his group of disciples.

Simon met his death trying to outfox Saint Peter. Traveling to Rome, Simon asked Peter if he could purchase the secret of Christian "magic," hoping to provoke Peter into a battle of wits.

The offended Peter engaged Simon in a series of debates until Simon challenged him to a magical duel in the streets of Rome. To prove his puissance over the Christians, Simon leaped and soared through the air. It seemed Simon finally outshone Peter, but when the Apostle prayed for God to remove the demons supporting Simon's invisible wings, he plummeted to the ground and died.

Despite his ignoble end, Simon's disciples refused to lose faith, and the Gnostic cult of Simon Magus persevered for over a hundred years. The feats of Simon cover all areas of Hermetic magic. He endured fire without being burnt, caused beards to grow on children, and trees to sprout suddenly from the ground. He could change his face to resemble the visage of another, dig through mountains and pass through rocks as though made of soft clay. He became invisible to the eyes of mortals, created gold from nothing, and flew through the air (albeit briefly).

The Simonians were as addicted to magic as their founder, employing exorcisms and incantations, love-philters and enchantments, familiar spirits and dream-senders. Menander, the immediate successor of Simon in Samaria, said that with magic, a wizard could overcome the angels who had created this world.

Gnosticism

Did Gnosticism begin as a Christian heresy? Or were the Gnostics the legacy of ancient pagan mystics? We may never know, but the Gnostic mysteries unite all that came before them, perhaps incomprehensibly. While Gnosticism itself fragmented as its leaders disagreed, its central goal remained the same: seeking the mysteries not from study, or science, but divine revelation.

Simon Magus introduced the concept of the gnosis, or "sacred truth." He preached that all evil sprouted from a break within the Godhead. The 3rd century work Pistis Sophia, however, presents the first full explanation of the gnosis: The world, produced from evil matter and possessed by evil demons, cannot be a creation of a good God. It must be an illusion, or an abortion, dominated by Yahweh, the Jewish demiurge, the demonic ruler of the material world. This world must be alien to the true, good God. The real world of God and his good spirits is the pleroma, the realm of light. Humanity, native to the realm of light, is entrapped in the false world of darkness by the demiurge. To escape, humanity must be rescued by divine intervention.

Gnosticism differs from Christianity, Platonism, Stoicism, and so many others because the pursuit of reason and living the good life does not lead to salvation. We sleep, unable to awake, awaiting the Savior.

Ophites

According to the Ophite Gnostics, the demiurge Jehovah (one of many evil beings) sealed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, denying them the all-important knowledge of good and evil. The serpent of Eden was the true liberator of mankind. It taught Adam to understand good and evil, to know that Jehovah was in fact evil, and to pursue the true, hidden good God. Jehovah punished the serpent by casting him down into the underworld. There, the serpent begat six sons, and together these seven demons represent the true force of good in the world. These seven good demons oppose the seven planets, powerful spiritual beings aligned with Jehovah. Ophites called the seven celestial planets the Holy Hebdomad, consisting of Ialdabaoth, Iao, Sabaoth, Adonau, Eloeus, Oreus and Astanphaeus.

Jesus, the Ophites say, was nothing but a man who served as the vessel of the Christ, an emanation of the true, good God. As the Christ descended through the seven heavens to the evil Earth, it emptied each heaven of its power and united with the mortal called Jesus, who then taught the gnosis in an attempt to save humanity from the demiurges.

Sethians

The Sethian Gnostics took their name from Seth, son of Adam, who is regarded in some circles as a unique recipient of divine revelation and as the author of sacred books. The historian Josephus in his Jewish Antiquities recorded that Seth and his descendants discovered the art of astronomy and that one of the two pillars on which they recorded their findings still existed in his time.

The Confession of Cyprian

"What the Lord keeps secret is no concern of yours; Do not busy yourself with matters that are beyond you."
--Ecclesiastes 3:22-23

Cyprian was a magician by profession in the 3rd century, who, after being educated from childhood in heathen mysteries and the magic arts, repented and was baptized, became bishop of Antioch, and finally achieved a martyr's crown. The Confession describes his education and subsequent practice of magic.

At a tender age Cyprian was consecrated as a gift to Apollo and initiated into the arts of the dragon. When not yet seven years old, he entered the mysteries of Mithras. At ten his parents enrolled him as a citizen of Athens where he carried a torch in the mysteries of Demeter and ministered to the dragon on the citadel of Pallas. When not yet fifteen, he visited Mount Olympus for forty days. There he saw the phalanx of each god and goddess, and how from Mount Olympus spirits were dispatched to every nation of the earth.

Cyprian's parents demanded he learn whatever there was in earth and air and sea. Cyprian traveled to Egypt to study at ancient shrines. He went to Chaldea to learn the lore of air, fire and light. At the age of 30 he had acquired great mastery over the world and returned to Antioch to experiment in magic. The people of Antioch celebrated him as a magician and philosopher endowed with vast knowledge of things invisible.

But later the Christian girl Justina revealed to him the weakness and fraud of the devil, and it was her example which caused Cyprian to turn with disgust from magic, publicly confess his crimes as a magician, burn his books of magic and be baptized into the Christian faith.

The Enochian Psalmists, A Secret Society

Symbol: Two Obsidian Tablets

Motto: "Light from divine darkness."

Patrons: Biblical magicians

House Affiliations: Any

Flaw Requirements: Vow (To follow the Commandments) -2

Origin Myth: The Seeker faction known as the Enochian Psalmists rejects most of the Old Ones legend, believing instead in the Biblical and later sources as literal truth rather than metaphor. Devout Christians, the Psalmists view magic as a gift of the Divine. They follow the early rabbinical and Christian legends of biblical divine magicians and claim to carry the secrets of Adam, Enoch, and Moses. They are fascinated by the stories of Ham, son of Noah, that link him to Hermes. The most heated topic among the Psalmists, all great lovers of disputation, is whether the Church correctly portrays Ham as a practitioner of evil magic, or if Ham in fact preserved beneficent divine magic from the Flood.

Levels of Initiation: They are organized along the lines of a monastic orders. The Psalmists usually form together in covenants, overseen by an Abbot. All report to the Superior General who resides in the covenant of the Sacred Tear, in the Greater Alps Tribunal, the center of this society.

Goals and Practices: The Psalmist's main goal is to discover and purge what sinful elements of the Hermetic Arts make working magic an anathema to the Divine and divine auras. To meet this end, the Psalmists join other Seeker factions in the centuries-old treasure hunt for artifacts of biblical and earlier ages. Unlike other Seekers, the Psalmists strive be on friendly terms with exotic magicians that share similar ideas.

Psalmists care little about concealing their existence and political machinations from the Order at large. Psalmists openly proselytize their beliefs and write Psalters and texts on harmonizing Christian hermetism with Hermetic magic. The secrets they have uncovered, however, remain closely guarded, for fear of what "black magic" could do with them.

Virtues Taught: Hermetic Theurgy (+1), Arithmancy (+1) Ars Notoria (+3), Bibliomancy (+3).

Just Like Any Other Job

How To Run A Military Campaign That Is More Than Just A Tactical Simulation

by Steph Pennington

18-year-old Steph: Mom, Dad . . . I've decided to join the Army.

Steph's Mom: Oh no, you can't! We're in the middle of a war; you'll be killed!

Steph: I'll be fine, Mom.

Steph's Mom: They'll treat you so badly, and it'll all be fighting!

Steph's Dad (a Vietnam Vet): Actually, it's not that bad. Being in the Army is just like any other job...once you get out of Basic. You go to work, and then you go back home. The only difference is you know what you're going to wear everyday.

Every time a military-themed RPG or RPG supplement comes out, people begin to wonder how ever a game can be run with soldier PC's. Some must imagine that soldiers are 24/7 killing machines with no self-determination, engaging in endless battles as a mere cog in a larger unit with no real way to make an individual difference. This article attempts to address ways to conduct a military campaign that does not consist solely of battle after battle, and should serve as a sort of a primer to Army life for those who've never been through it.

On the Outside

The average party, depending on genre, consists of a disparate group of individuals all with different backgrounds who come together for some reason to "adventure." GMs sometimes spend a lot of time trying contrive reasons to get the party together and adventuring, especially in modern settings. The groups roam freely, doing their monster-slaying, horse-thief-wrangling, alien-contacting, or whatever it is they are doing. But is this always the case?

Many games already deal with the characters' conflict between adventuring and their profession: Will The Professor be able to take time off to investigate the Things Man Was Not Meant to Know? Will Madame Green be able to hide her super-spy identity from her unsuspecting family? Some campaigns also have the players belonging to an organization where their freedom is somewhat limited; *World of Darkness* vampires have the Court and the Traditions to contend with, Spies usually have their missions dictated to them by their controllers, and Lensmen certainly don't have freedom to do whatever they want. GMs deal with these difficulties all the time, so what makes the military setting so much more daunting? Perhaps it's lack of familiarity.

You're in the Army Now

Contrary to belief, soldiers are not all the same. Each one has their own personality, and each had their own life before they joined -- or were drafted into -- the military. Just as *Vampire: The Masquerade* recommends discussing and determining what each character's life was like before they were turned into a vampire, it would be useful to determine what each would-be soldier was like before they joined the military. Some GMs may even go so far as to have the players create civilian versions of their soon-to-be soldiers. Some questions to ask:

- How old was the soldier when he joined/was drafted? Was he 18 and fresh out of high school? Was she a 27-year-old single mother?
- What was he doing before entering the military? Was he the high school nerd or star quarterback? Was he a corporate lawyer? A minor league baseball player? The King of Rock and Roll?
- The military draws in people from all regions and classes. Where did this soldier come from? The Hills of

Appalachia? Inner-city Detroit? An exclusive prep school in New England?

- Does he have any hardships/secrets/dependents? Is he married? Does he have children? Is he secretly homosexual? Is he of the same race/ethnic background as the enemy? Is he overweight?
- And perhaps the most important question: why is this person in the military? Was he drafted? Did he join in order to avoid the draft, and therefore guarantee a better assignment? Did he join for the college money? Did he have no other job opportunities? Did he come from a small town where the only way out was the military? Were his parents military?

There are two further personality questions that should be addressed, even though they crop up after joining the military: Do they like being in the military? Is the soldier STRAC or slack? STRAC stands for "Strong, Tough, Ready Around the Clock," and would be used to describe a soldier who is enthusiastic, follows the rules, spends time looking good in uniform, always tries to get the maximum score on the firing range and the Physical Training (PT) test, and who knows all of the details. Slackers polish their shoes with Hershey bars, don't iron their uniforms, refer to people as "Sarg" and in general don't take the rules as seriously as their STRAC counterparts. STRAC soldiers like to yell "Hooah!" and they mean it. Slackers avoid saying "hooah!" and other such noises and grunts . . . and when they do say it, they usually mean it unflatteringly.

Knowing all of this information will help flesh out the character, so that each soldier is not a cookie-cutter fighting man pumped out with a template.

So, what's your MOS?

MOS stands for Military Operational Specialty, and it is one of the questions that soldiers always ask each other when they first meet. This question is perhaps the most important question a GM will have to think about. The majority of men and women serving in the militaries around the world are not combat arms, even during times of war. If a GM does not want to focus on constant battles, don't have the soldiers be combat arms. There have been many wonderful films and TV shows dealing with soldiers who are not active combatants that are full of roleplaying opportunities. The television shows *China Beach* and *M*A*S*H* dealt with medical personnel during war, and included Doctors, Nurses, Undertakers, Entertainers, Admin, and the odd Infantry man or two. The film *Night of the Generals* deals with a German military criminal detective who's investigating a series of prostitute murders that were committed by a German Officer. The television show *JAG* also follows the exploits of military criminal investigators. The main character of the film *Full Metal Jacket* was a combat journalist, and the main character of *Good Morning Vietnam* was a radio disk jockey. Characters can range from military intelligence interrogators and Military Police to administrative assistants, cooks, and supply clerks. There are any number of different jobs a soldier can have, and not everyone in the adventuring party has to have the same job. Whichever jobs the players and GM decide will be appropriate, there is always the chance running into combat, but non-combat professions will also offer other adventuring possibilities.

You are a Soldier 24/7

This is a phrase often heard, but not exactly true. Soldiers have a lot of free time, and they spend it doing any number of things. Admittedly, free time often includes drinking and bar fights, but it can also involve hanging out with friends from other units (like the other PCs, perhaps?), exploring the nearest town, and doing what any person does in their free time. If GMs can think of adventuring hooks for regular adventurers to do in their spare time, they can think of adventuring hooks for soldier characters. Of course, there are consequences for not showing up to work when the weekend is over, whether that job is as a soldier or as a teacher. Soldiers -- even combat arms soldiers -- are often called on to do random miscellaneous duty here and there. This can range from running errands for the commander, picking up new soldiers who've just arrived "in country," guard duty, participating in a touring soldier's entertainment show, or driving the "drunk trunk" (a the truck that goes the strip of bars in the local town and picks up all the drunk soldiers and takes them back to their unit).

You Gotta Watch Out For The Civilians

Then of course, there are the civilians. These civilians range from the captain's eighteen-year-old daughter with mischief on her mind, to the meddling reporter who's always getting in the way and trying to paint the PCs as child-killers. Civilians may be the love interest, the spy, the nuisance, the friend, or even the PC. They should not be overlooked as gaming tools. Militaries often needed the aid of locals for their area knowledge and language skills, giving a wider variety of characters to interact with. Any modern military campaign will also have to deal with the media. And don't forget kids; there are always children, whether the child is Newt from *Aliens* or the young boy who was actually Viet Cong in *Good Morning Vietnam*. Soldiers will eventually run into the general populace in the course of their military adventuring; do not pass up the opportunity to interact with them.

But What About The Battle?

The GM who doesn't want to run through tactical wargame scenarios may find the idea of refereeing a battle very unexciting, but they can be just as exciting as any RPG combat. There are two things that can help the GM when running battles: militaries break things down to both large and small group objectives, and by all accounts, battle is confusing. A squad consists of 10 people, and squads are often broken up into two teams of five each. Five is a perfect size for an adventuring party. During a battle, every unit -- including teams -- will have their own objective. Give the adventuring party their own battle objective, and have whoever send them off to do it. The party may need to take a point, or break through an enemy line, or just get to Point B from Point A. In the confusion of battle, they will not always be able to tell what is happening with the rest of their unit. The GM can make mass combat rolls for the larger units modified by whether the party was successful in making their goals or not. The PCs can then have an effect on the battle's outcome, for good or ill. They may find themselves successful in taking their bridge and then learn that the rest of their company is broken and retreating; what will they do then? They will have to determine for themselves what comes next.

Adventure Seeds

- **Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?** -- A famous heartthrob has come to the war zone to entertain the troops. The lucky heroes have been assigned to act as chaperones and protectors. They must follow the star around, fulfill their wishes, and keep them safe from drunken and overly-enthusiastic crowds of soldiers. This mission could be made more difficult depending on the star's personality; perhaps the star is spoiled and contrary, or perhaps the star is overly-friendly and likes to wade into crowds of adoring fans. What if the star has a stalker?
- **Missing Person!** -- An NPC buddy comes to the soldiers one Sunday morning in a panic. His wife, an Army WAC (or a Navy WAVE, Air Force WAFE, Marine WAM, or member of the Women's Royal Army Corps) didn't come home Friday night. She originally told him she was going on a "Girls Night Out" with some other military women and that she might not be back until early Saturday morning. But now it's Sunday and she's still not home. Of course he's desperately worried about her safety, but he also knows that if she doesn't show up for work Monday morning she'll be AWOL; since she works as the General's secretary, she will be in very big trouble indeed. What if the heroes talk to the wife's friends, and it turns out she never went out with them after all? Why was she lying and where is she now? What if she were actually a spy . . . and for who's side?
- **Patrol** -- The team is sent out into the bush/forest/wherever on patrol. The small unit patrol has a lot a possibilities. They go out and report on what they see, and ambush any enemies that they can. What if they run into a very large unit that is convoying a very important high-ranking enemy leader? What if they run into some defenseless enemy soldiers bathing in a stream? What if there are too many of them to capture? What if they come upon innocent school children who ask for help . . . and are actually working for the enemy? What if their base camp get wiped out and decimated while they're on patrol; now they are on their own with limited supplies behind enemy lines.
- **Unit Day** -- The PCs are chosen to represent their unit in a competition versus a rival set of units. The event could involve a relay race, fighting with pugil sticks, an obstacle course, eating nasty foods . . . perhaps even darts, pool, or bowling. This gives the PCs a chance to use some non-combat skills. Of course if they win, they will bring glory to their unit, and get lots of perks for a while. If they lose, the Commander who just lost his bet with the rival Commander will be very displeased. And an unhappy commander can make your life miserable.
- **Courtesy Patrol** -- The PCs are assigned to Courtesy Patrol over the weekend. Their job: to patrol the strip of

bars that cater to the soldiers, and extract their unit members from trouble/outrageous drunken behavior before they get caught and locked up by the Military Police. This could range from the humorous (Pvt. Fields engaging in a lot of drunken hijinx and the PCs desperately trying to shield him from the eyes of the MPs), to the serious. For example, a soldier has gotten into a bar fight and killed a local national. Some local nationals have formed an angry mob and are about to lynch the soldier--the PCs have got to save the soldier and get him into the hands of the MPs before it's too late.

- **The Weirdo Cult** -- Some fellow members of the company start acting really weird and reclusive. Then they disappear. Investigating their rooms/foot lockers turns up evidence that the group all belonged to some strange alien cult, and have gone AWOL to go to the secret place where they will bring forth the second coming (don't laugh, this actually happened in my unit!). In a no-weirdness campaign, they could just be crazies . . . but perhaps they kidnapped one of the PCs best buddies. But what if there *is* weirdness in the world? Perhaps the PCs should try to stop this second coming; after all, they are the only ones that figured out the cryptic message left behind that says where the ceremony will take place . . .
- Of course, after assembling a group of well rounded soldiers with fleshed out backgrounds, GMs would also be able to find many plot hooks based on the PCs pre-military lives as well.

There is a lot of opportunity for adventure in military games; with a little thinking outside the box, a military campaign can be as varied and interesting as any other.

Designer's Notes: *GURPS Cabal* and *GURPS Horror*, Third Edition

by Kenneth Hite

*"Now is the winter of our discontent,
Made glorious summer . . . "*
-- William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, I:i:1-2

GURPS Horror, Second Edition, by J.M. Caparula, was one of the first *GURPS* books I ever bought. It's the second printing, and my copy still has a *Chicago Tribune* handy "clip 'n' save" serial killer guide from the summer of 1991 in it as a bookmark, so I probably bought it in the winter of 1990. This was one terrific book, from the Michael Whelan "Smiler" cover all the way to the six pages of recommended film and reading (which, not incidentally, first introduced me to the writing of Lisa Goldstein). The GMing advice alone was the first really useful guide to horror gaming as such that I'd ever run across, even after a decade of playing *Call of Cthulhu*. And in Chapter Three, I first read the story of the Cabal, an ancient order of monsters and magicians who ganged up to greedily hoard supernatural power for themselves and occasionally whale the tar out of the PCs. (I later found out that Scott Haring invented the Cabal back in 1987, as a two-and-a-half-page sidebar in the first edition of *GURPS Horror*. I hope Scott likes what I did to his babies.) The whole concept was pretty cool, but two things in it really resonated.

*"And for less cause than this, a strong cabal
Can make one's life a labyrinth of troubles."*
-- Jean-Baptiste Molière, *Tartuffe*, IV:iii:68-69

The first thing was a passage, I presume written by Caparula, that truly embodied the Cabal for me: "Cabal Masters of the past are mummified in preservation chambers in secret catacombs, awaiting resurrection. Mages specializing in necromancy are rumored to have already animated some of the ancient Masters, who are now walking the Earth again." That's an almost perfect example of good game book text, regardless of its virtues as English prose. (That "are rumored" may be passive voice, but here the uncertainty about who, exactly, is doing the rumoring adds to the unease.) You have words like "necromancy," and that great Biblical echo of the ancient Masters "walking the Earth again." You also note that the Cabal has pretensions to Egyptian antiquity ("mummified") that don't really tie in with the wack *Dr. Who* phrase "preservation chambers in secret catacombs," but you still get a nice, jarring anachronism out of it -- it seems kind of creepier to have a "preservation chamber" tucked away in an "ancient catacomb" rather than in a gleaming bank of freezers in a professional building somewhere. You also note that the Cabal isn't as unified as it would like to pretend -- someone is spreading those rumors about their fellow Cabalists, who would seem to have jumped the ancient conspiracy gun by reviving their Masters early. You also note that these ancient Masters are just "animated," not having necessarily achieved "resurrection." Eeewww.

The other absolutely dead-on thing in that chapter, for me, was a line drawing by (I guess from the signature) John D. Waltrip on page 33. Here we have a Peter Cushing-looking dude, most likely a Cabalist, with a horrible grimoire open in his hand (you can see the pentagrams). He's standing in front of a leaded-glass window; you know, just from that detail and the drape, that it's one of those impossible, overstuffed, brocaded Victorian-Edwardian studies you see in Hammer Films and Sherlock Holmes episodes. He's about to read a spell, and you can see by the lift of his eyebrow and the quirk of his mouth that he knows it's some seriously bad juju. But hey, he's Peter Cushing -- he's a Cabalist -- he'll survive whatever (or Whoever) it is. But that eyebrow lift is saying, "Shame about those drapes." Or, possibly, "Shame about London." Looking at that picture, you just know that that's how the Cabal operates. No angst, no moaning about the dark glories of the whatever. Just creepy Peter Cushing types reading from grimoires to see how much of the leaded glass is blown out afterward.

So, when Steve Jackson and I dropped mutual hints that we'd like me to write a whole worldbook on the Cabal, I resolved to make it worthy of that Peter Cushing-looking dude. I wanted to capture that whole Hammer Films feeling,

and write a world "where *The Mummy* meets *Imajica*," as I believe I told the long-suffering Herr Doktor Professor Kromm. The Cabal wasn't hunted, they were the hunters. But even hunters can run into trouble deep in the jungle. My desire to challenge a conspiracy that, from the design document, had an armlock on the world's supernatural resources meant that I had to give them more worlds to conquer, or rather, to explore -- to hunt in. The throwaway mention of the Kabbalah gave me those worlds; in order to get bigger, wilder planes I went with the Four Worlds rather than the Ten Spheres (although I later wrote up the Sephiroth and put them back in again). I also had to reconcile, and then expand mightily, the Second Edition description of the Cabal -- I decided early on that I would, if possible, not contradict a single word of that description. Instead, I would add more detail, more backstory, and a few things the Cabal forgot to mention ten years ago. (I wound up fixing the Latin degree names and changing only one other detail -- see if you can spot it!) I knew I was on the right track when Egyptian history obligingly gave me a chaotic hole where I could stick the otherwise-unattested "Khaibitu-na-Khonsu." The rest fell into place after that. It was time to decide what the Cabal was hiding.

It has always amused me that there are whole rafts of modifiers and special cases and calculations and so forth in *GURPS* for shooting a gun, which is in actuality one of the simplest things in the world -- but that casting a spell in the basic *GURPS* magic system is three dice and a cloud of dust. Wham, bam, fireball, ma'am. Nothing like any system of magic ever practiced in the Real World, certainly. The Western "Hermetic" magic tradition (the one the Cabal, as practitioners of "Egyptian wisdom" would use) is delightfully lush and maniacally complex, rich with flavors and nuances stemming from Babylonian religious iconography, Renaissance paint chemistry, and probably serious neurological disorder. I resolved to make Hermetic Magic potentially very powerful, and at least as complex as firing a gun -- and get in more of that Hammer Films flavor as I did it. Since the Cabal used the basic magic system in *GURPS Horror*, they would have to in *GURPS Cabal*, too.

Frankly, I was kind of relieved by that decision -- C.J. Carella had already designed a really cool Ritual Magic system for *GURPS Voodoo*, and I didn't want to reinvent that wondrous wheel. I was free to come up with a "magic system for gearheads," as I described it, again to Dr. Kromm, who had to have been wondering at that point what he had unleashed. (Unreliable witnesses claimed to have heard me refer to the book as "*GURPS Black Ops* for *Nephilim* fans, and vice versa.") In the end, sanity won a precarious rear-guard victory, and I designed a bunch of "lenses" for people who wanted more of the flavor with less of the work. (I rewarded myself with the Sidebar From Hell, in which I came up with magical modifiers for every imaginable thing from sweaters to solstices.) To backstop me, I rescued S. John Ross' incredibly cool and evil Black Magic rules, and matched them with some Words of Power. (It occurs to me, now that it's too late, that Words of Power would be even neater if casting them only cost 36 points of energy, instead of 360. Try it and see.) The rest was just a matter of jamming in as many Easter Eggs and lathering on as much flavor as I possibly could. (And thanks to Chris Shy's amazing art, there's no shortage of creepy Peter Cushing-looking guys in this book, either.) With the campaign chapter especially, but throughout the book, I tried to make sure that there were always slots and modules for any GM or player to change, insert, ignore, or turn up to eleven anything and everything in the book. All good game books say, "You can change whatever you want." I wanted this book to show you how, and give you some idea of why you might want to. I wanted *GURPS Cabal* to be sticky, but not heavy; to be as fine a piece of work as *GURPS Warehouse 23*, *Black Ops*, and *Illuminati*, my own personal "Holy Trinity" of *GURPS* books, but to be fully adjustable by people whose tastes ran more toward, say, *Psionics*, *Voodoo*, and *Blood Types*.

*"And much of Madness, and more of Sin,
And Horror the soul of the plot."*

-- Edgar Allan Poe, "The Conqueror Worm"

At some point along the line, SJG decided that, since they were releasing a chapter from *GURPS Horror* as its own book, they should revise and reprint *GURPS Horror*, too. At the time, I seemed like the logical candidate for the job, and so another book's worth of writing and research landed on my desk while I was giving para-elementals a good beat-down. The words "bit off more than I could chew" recurred more than once as I set about reconstructing, restyling, and revising *GURPS Horror*. The first decisions were the easy ones that SJG had already made -- the Cabal chapter obviously went, as did the three "mini worldbook" settings in the back. *GURPS Cliffhangers* now covered the Roaring '20s, *Steampunk* (and *Screampunk*) covers Victoriana rather better than a chapter could, and a handful of *GURPS* books gave us "Modern Day" gaming with a vengeance.

I kept virtually all of the second edition's gaming advice -- I knew from practice just how good it was! It had, in fact, been a major influence on my own book of horror GMing advice, *Nightmares of Mine*, which, none too available to begin with, had dropped startlingly out of print with the publisher's (Iron Crown Enterprises') bankruptcy. Fortunately, the rights reverted to me, and I set about revising, *GURPS*ifying, and tightening much of that work to become my own contribution to the Third Edition's newly-reorganized sections on GMing advice (including more focused advice on high-powered games and superheroic horror), campaign creation, and player advice. This last was a new departure for me; I put my own horror games in a mirror, and figured out what worked for my players. (I had almost as much fun coming up with modern-day horror-bashing gear as I did the "Five Rs" and "Five Ts" of monster-hunting.) The other major section I kept was the Foes chapter -- but I completely tore it out and remodeled it. Rather than a litany of bestiary stats for formula critters, I took the things from the ground up. What fear does each monster symbolize; what does it prey upon? Then (with the able help of stat-wranglers Jesse Lowe and Werner H. Hartmann) I came up with racial templates for almost forty monsters from ghouls (three kinds!) to evil clowns to Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. Some of them are new, and one of them (the "ripper") wound up completely original to the book! With these changes, the monsters stop being targets, and start being true personalities, symbolic and important to the story. Plus, the second edition came out a year before every horror gamer in America started dressing up like a vampire -- now, at last, you could play a monster using *GURPS Horror*. (I also had the advantage of Kromm's excellent *GURPS Undead*, from which I stole liberally.) I realized that since I'd just gone to the trouble to create monster templates, I'd better replace the old character types with proper templates, too -- this was one ready-to-play book.

Except that I'd removed all the settings. Not to worry; I borrowed a notion from Bill Stoddard's fabulous *GURPS Steampunk* and added three "Worked Examples" to demonstrate how I built horror campaign frames using the tools and parameters I'd explained earlier in the book. For each frame, I added other variations to allow maximum utility, and gave five sample narrative arcs or story seeds to get GMs going. One of the frames got yanked at the last minute (although don't be surprised if it turns up on the schedule in a different form), but the final draft still boasted three "Tales to Terrify":

- "Seas of Dread, Sails of Daring," in which I combined *GURPS Horror* with *Swashbucklers* for a dark pulp-fantasy Western in the pirate Caribbean. (This setting also allowed me to cram in seven more monsters from the second edition that I would have had to leave out otherwise.)
- "Blood in the Craters," which is an investigative, somewhat gritty *Steampunk-Horror* campaign set in the ruins of London after a Martian invasion. Here, I tried to explicitly demonstrate how to use the new monster fear themes to build monsters tuned precisely to a setting's feel.
- "The Madness Dossier," which slides an open void of psychological dread underneath two of my favorite comic book series from the last decade, Grant Morrison's *The Invisibles*, and Warren Ellis' *Planetary*. I made it an espionage campaign set amid the fragile scrimms of reality; the foes here are Babylonian demons -- or alien entities -- or genetically engineered control castes -- or all three. This frame is about tone and experimentation, and pushing the envelope of setting design for the sake of a bad feeling.

All that was left was the Bibliography and Filmography, which I nearly doubled in size. I left every film and book recommended in the second edition on the list, although I felt obliged to change one or two annotations (Charles Fort is the farthest thing from "unreadable"!) and fix the publication data. Each "Tale to Terrify" got its own mini-bibliography of inspirational reading, too. By the end of the process, I was well into the Late and Increasingly Chilly Autumn of Horror, but I think that I successfully updated what I've always thought of as "my first *GURPS* book" for the new era of *GURPS*, and added some stuff that whoever writes *GURPS Horror, Fourth Edition* in ten years will keep around. Enjoy it until then, and pleasant screams.

Appendix Z: Not-So-Plain Sailing

by David Morgan-Mar

Not all sea voyages are routine. Sailing vessels are especially vulnerable to the elements, as well as myriad other problems which can arise during a voyage. Some events are relatively minor and can add some interest or excitement to a dull trip, while others are more serious or occur as a result of combat. Here is a list of some possible events and problems which might occur on board a sailing ship. GMs can use events from this list randomly, choose one when some extra color is required, or incorporate some of these into naval combat damage result tables.

Minor Problems

- **Becalmed** -- The wind dies down completely, leaving the ship unable to move by sail. This condition may last several days. Desperate crews may try towing the ship with rowed boats.
- **Boat Damaged** -- One of the ship's boats has sustained some form of damage which leaves it unable to be used. . . most likely a hole in the hull.
- **Broken Rudder** -- The rudder or its control shaft has snapped, making steering the ship difficult or impossible. Alternatively, the rudder may be jammed, forcing the ship to turn circles.
- **Cargo Damaged** -- Whatever cargo the ship is carrying is damaged or destroyed. Sea water may ruin foodstuffs, spices, or cloth, while manufactured items can be damaged or broken by the ship's motion. Some cargo, such as gold, is immune to damage.
- **Disease** -- Some form of disease runs rampant through the crew. Suitable diseases include scurvy, plague, typhoid, cholera, dysentery. Note that scurvy is caused by vitamin C deficiency and is not contagious.
- **Fog** -- A thick fog obscures vision, making navigation all but impossible. If the ship is moving, it risks running into other objects.
- **Food Spoilt** -- Food stores on board are spoilt, either by sea water, vermin, or general rotting. If rotten food is eaten, disease may result. If all the food is spoilt, a port with fresh supplies will be required quickly.
- **Leaking Caulk** -- The caulking between the planks of the hull starts leaking at a rate faster than it can be repaired. The hold will slowly fill with water and will need to be pumped out to prevent swamping and possibly sinking.
- **Man Overboard** -- A crew member or passenger falls overboard and requires rescuing.
- **Rats** -- Rats on board reach plague proportions. They have probably eaten much of the ships supplies to reach such numbers. They may also spread disease. Desperate crew may resort to eating rat meat . . .
- **Snapped Line** -- A rope snaps, the broken ends whipping back violently. Anyone in the way may be struck and injured.
- **Tangled Lines** -- Some ropes or rigging become tangled. Sail trim is lost and ship speed drops until the mess is sorted out.
- **Torn Sails** -- Some or all of the sails are torn and useless. Speed of the ship will be reduced to maximum speed times the cube root of the fraction of sail remaining. (For simpler calculation, simply reduce speed by the fraction of sail lost.)

Major Problems

- **Broken Mast** -- A mast snaps and all its associated sails and rigging come down. The mast may fall through the sails and rigging of another mast, destroying those as well. Sailing speed will be reduced, as per Torn Sails. Many ropes may snap, causing possible lash injuries to crew.
- **Cannon Explosion** -- One of the ship's guns explodes, spraying shrapnel across the gun-deck. A section of the hull may be damaged, and a fire is possible.
- **Fire** -- Part of the ship catches fire. Sails will go up quickly, while a fire below decks may smoulder or progress slowly.

- Hull Breach** -- A section of the hull is stove in or out, either by an impact, explosion, or just heavy seas acting on a weak point. If the damage is above the waterline, the ship may sail on, though at risk of being swamped by waves. If the breach is below the waterline, the ship will sink and should be abandoned.
- **Iceberg** -- An iceberg is spotted by a lookout. Evasive action needs to be taken. If the ship hits the iceberg, a hull breach is likely, almost certainly below the waterline.
 - **Lost Anchor** -- An anchor chain snaps and the anchor is lost into the deep. If this was the only one, the ship will be unable to rest at anchor.
 - **Magazine Explosion** -- The ship's gunpowder magazine explodes. This causes massive damage, probably rupturing the hull and setting fire to anything left. Nearby crew will take heat and concussion damage and possibly shrapnel damage. Other structures on the ship may fail.
 - **Pirate Attack** -- The ship is chased down and attacked by pirates. Ship's guns will be brought to bear and the pirates will attempt to board and capture the ship if the cannon battle does not drive them off.
 - **Run Aground** -- The ship hits a sandbar, reef, or rocks, and sticks fast. The hull may be breached or even shattered entirely, but this is not inevitable. If the hull is intact, the ship might be able to float free at the next high tide, or it might need to be towed free.
 - **Storm** -- A serious storm lashes the ship. High winds and mountainous seas toss it like a toy. Sails must be furled or risk being torn. Masts may break. Loose items on deck will be lost overboard and items below decks will be tossed around and may sustain damage.
 - **Water Spoilt** -- The ship's fresh water stores are spoilt by contamination or lost to leakage. This is a serious problem and a port with fresh water will need to be found within a day or so or the crew will suffer from dehydration and eventually die.

Pyramid Pick

Carcassonne

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Written by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

Illustrated by Doris Matthäus

Translated by Jay Tummelson

\$19.95

Carcassonne is not only the name of a city in southern France, but also the name of an award-winning German board game from Hans im Glück, that is available in English from Rio Grande Games. The city itself is famous for its unique mix of Roman and Medieval fortifications. In the game, it is the area around *Carcassonne* that the players attempt to develop and then deploy their followers to take control of, and score points for doing so.

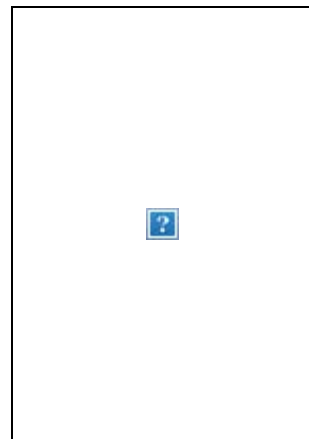
The game consists of some seventy-two square tiles, a scoreboard, and five sets of followers in vibrant colors, plus a fully illustrated, four-page rules booklet. Both the tiles and scoreboard are done on thick card and the followers in solid pieces of wood. The tiles depict the various segments of the cities, roads, and fields around *Carcassonne*, as well as the numerous cloisters, which actually sit in the very center of their tiles. *Carcassonne* is designed for two to five players, ages ten and over, with a suggested playing length of about an hour.

The players begin by placing the starting tile on the table, face up. The remainder are shuffled and stacked face down into four piles. Each player takes their eight followers and places one on the scoreboard, keeping the rest in front of them as their supply of followers. The youngest player decides who will go first and play then proceeds clockwise around the table.

Each turn, a player draws and places a single land tile. This tile must also be shown to the other players so they can suggest possible placement, which must be adjacent to tile or tiles in play. Tiles must be placed so that any city, field, or road segment on the new tile continues on to the tile or tiles it is placed next to. Tiles cannot be placed so that they are corner to corner. Although there is an obvious upwards orientation to the pleasingly illustrated tiles, this is not important to placement. When there is no place for a drawn tile to be put down, it is discarded and a new one drawn instead. In general, this is a rare occurrence, but actually more common during the opening moves of the game. (For those who dislike the too-random an element of drawing a single tile, two could be drawn instead, one used and the other returned to the stacks, or a variation thereof.)

Once he has placed his tile, a player can decide to deploy a single follower onto the tile they have just played and it is the tile that determines what the follower becomes. Knights are placed onto city segments, thieves on a road or crossing segment, farmers onto field segments and monks into cloisters.

If -- by placing a tile -- a city, cloister or road is completed, then these are scored. Cities are completed when it is completely walled with no gaps, roads are completed if they run between locations or form a loop, and cloisters when the cloister tile is totally surrounded by other land tiles. If there is more than one follower on a completed city or road, the player with the most knights or thieves deployed in the completed section wins any points scored. If there is a tie between the players in the numbers deployed, then all tying players gain the points. This is somewhat irrelevant in a two-player game, as it does not affect any difference in their respective scores, which are marked on the scoreboard.



This only goes up as far as fifty, and if a score rises above that -- as is common in a two-player game -- the marker is laid upon its side to indicate the difference.

After any city, cloister, or road is scored, any followers involved are returned to the supply of any players so involved. The exception to this are the followers deployed as farmers. These remain on the board in their field segments until the end of the game, when they earn points for any completed cities that their fields connect to, and they thus supply. Additionally, any remaining uncompleted cities, roads, or cloisters which still have followers on them earn a few more points. The winner, of course, is the one with the most points.

Although designed for up to five players, *Carcassonne* describes itself as being, "Especially good for two players." This is certainly the case, although those games take about half the suggested playing time. The most enjoyable aspect of the two-player game is that it does not rely upon destroying or wearing down an opponent's forces. Tactics revolve first around trying to get tiles placed where you need them, rather than where another player might want them; then in placing followers, which can quickly escalate into deployment contests as players vie for control of the larger cities and longer roads. In this there can also be a race to get these larger cities and longer roads completed, as then they can be scored and players have their followers returned to their dwindling supply. As this happens, followers tend to migrate towards the edge of the board as the game grows.

The current version of *Carcassonne* includes an additional twelve expansion river tiles. These depict a river as it rises from a spring and runs alongside the city to fill into a lake. In this variant, all of the river tiles are drawn and played before any of the tiles from the main game. River tile placement always begins with the spring tile and ends with the lake tile. The river tiles (of course) have to be placed so that the river can flow, and followers cannot be deployed onto rivers. The effect of the river in the game is to create a longer starting base for the rest of the game's tile placement. It could be interesting to see further tile expansion sets that add other terrain, such as forests and mountains.

Carcassonne won two notable awards -- Spiel des Jahres Game of the Year and Deutscher SpielePreis 1st place in 2001. It is hard not to see why. There is a high element of luck in *Carcassonne* -- the random drawing of the tiles -- but play becomes more tactical in placing both the tile and the follower. The mixture of the two is just about right for what is a light, fun game that can not only be enjoyed by the dedicated gamer, but by the family also.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Quest for the Unknown (for HackMaster)

Published by [Kenzer and Company](#)

Written by Brian Jelke, Steve Johansson, and David S. Kenzer

Cover Art by Stacy Drum

Interior Illustrations by Brendon Frain and Brian Frain

48 pages; \$11.99

Let me preface this review by stating exactly what *HackMaster* is for those of you that might be familiar with it only from the pages of the *Knights of the Dinner Table* comic. *HackMaster* is a real RPG from Kenzer and Company that is inspired (mostly) on 1st edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. While the various rulebooks that make up the game parody *D&D* in places and are filled with humorous and sometimes downright silly stuff, the rules themselves do make up a playable and (in my opinion) pretty darn fun little game. Of course, if you never liked the fact that a +2 shield "lowered" your armor class and didn't understand why your dwarf couldn't be a paladin, then you might want to look elsewhere for your gaming pleasure.

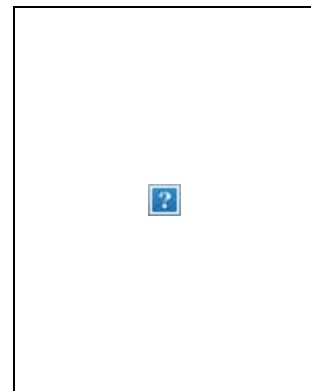
Quest for the Unknown is the first official adventure for *HackMaster* and is designed as a beginning adventure for a party of 3-6 1st-level characters. *Quest* is presented as a standard stapled booklet with maps inside the front and back covers. The cover painting depicts a group of adventurers with a greedy little halfling who has just stuck his hand in the wrong pool. The maps are printed in blue ink, just like the ones in the old *D&D* modules (thank goodness they can actually be photocopied with modern technology for note-taking). Layout is clean and the line art scattered throughout the adventure is well executed and of uniform quality. Each encounter with a monster even includes the appropriate illustration from the creature's entry in the *Hacklopedia of Beasts*.

Quest is a parody of *In Search of the Unknown*, the adventure that came with the first edition of the Basic *D&D* boxed set. (It was also my introduction to *D&D* and I still remember spotting it on the toy store shelf in between the Avalon Hill games. Gosh, it's hard for me to believe that was over twenty years ago . . .)

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Just like the original adventure, *Quest* is designed as an instructional adventure for beginning players and GameMasters. To this end, there is some basic information for the GM on how to prepare and use the adventure, and it is designed so as to not be too deadly for new players. Most of the traps are not killers and at least until the players make their way down to the second level (and encounter the troglodytes), they shouldn't have too much trouble surviving. The adventure contains monsters from several volumes of the *Hacklopedia of Beasts*, but enough information is provided to run them without access to those books.

The adventure itself is your basic crawl through a two-level dungeon that has apparently been abandoned by its original owners. The players can earn a few experience points for discovering some of the dungeon's mysteries (like why the owners disappeared), but that shouldn't get in the way of the monster-bashing and treasure-looting. Some parts of the adventure, like the room of pools and the garden filled with fungi, will be familiar to owners of the original inspiration. In general, the level of detail the authors provide for each room is outstanding, and they even give



a nod or two to good old-fashioned dungeon ecology.

Since it's a parody (not to mention a *HackMaster* adventure), *Quest* does contain some funny stuff. Here is a sample from *The Secrets of Chamoania*, a book the players can find in the dungeon's library. It is described as "the personal journal of a wizard studying a lost race of cannibals in the jungles of a place called Bafuan. It ends abruptly on page 182 . . ." There is plenty more -- like the hilarious player handout for The Diary of Melanee -- but I will let you have the pleasure of discovering it all for yourself.

The adventure contains a few more extras besides the diary, including another handout with background information for the adventure and tips for the players. The GM gets two battle sheets that contain statistics for the various monsters the players will encounter and check-off boxes to help him keep track of their hit points, armor damage, etc.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Quest for the Unknown would be a great way to kick off your *HackMaster* campaign and should provide you and your players with several evenings of quality dungeon crawling entertainment. For the grognards out there, it shouldn't be too hard to slide it into your 1st/2nd edition *AD&D* campaign. If you are especially adventurous, you might even try converting it for use with *3rd Edition*. (Of course, I would never suggest such a thing myself . . .

*(NOTE: If you are interested, the original **In Search of the Unknown** can still be purchased as an ESD electronic download from the [Wizards of the Coast](#) online store.)*

--Anthony Roberson

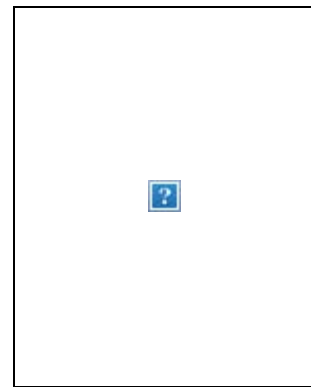
Pyramid Review

Eden Odyssey: Wonders Out of Time (for d20)

By [Eden Studios](#)

Written by **Kevin Wilson**

48 pages; \$9.95



Note: This review contains some mild spoilers. While none reveal secrets from the adventures contained in *Wonders Out of Time*, some of the Merithian culture's details are given -- a potential problem for those players who want to have their game world to remain completely surprising.

Eden Studio's excellent *d20* supplement *Wonders Out of Time*, like their previously released Eden Odyssey title *Akrasia: Thief of Time*, is not a single adventure. Instead, it provides a series of short linked adventures and background material with a common theme. In this case, *Wonders Out of Time* details the remains of the Merithian Empire, a collapsed magic-intensive civilization based stylistically on the Roman Empire. The loosely connected adventures are designed to be introduced throughout a campaign as the player characters gain levels, rather than in series, allowing the Merithian Empire to be a part of the background tapestry rather than making an awkward and jarring appearance. In addition to adventures, *Wonders Out of Time* includes a ten-page Appendix full of new monsters, magic items, NPCs, and a new magic system and prestige class. Because it is adaptable to almost any setting, *Wonders Out of Time* is an interesting and relatively inexpensive sourcebook for DMs looking for a quick and easy way of giving his campaign world usable historical depth. It should be noted that the information assumes the standard late-medieval to early renaissance Europe fantasy setting. Those using a different period or region to base their campaigns may have to alter some of this material.

The Merithian Empire, which reached the height of its culture 1,000 years before the "present day" of the game, is outlined for the DM in three pages. While this may sound too short to cover an entire culture, Wilson packs a surprising amount of material into this small space, introducing the basic outlines of Merithian history, culture, art, architecture, religion, and magic in a series of tables that includes the Difficulty Class (DCs) for knowing each bit of information. The relatively brief introduction provides an additional advantage, as it leaves plenty of room for the ambitious DM to add his own material, expanding on what is provided in *Wonders Out of Time* or personalizing it to fit into a preexisting campaign world.

The adventures themselves are well thought-out and nicely connected. There is a nice balance between the traditional dungeon-crawl setting and wilderness-style settings. The seven mini-adventures (set in six locations) are designed for players from 1st to 3rd, 2nd to 4th, 3rd to 6th, 5th to 8th, 6th to 9th, and two for 9th to 12th levels. Each can be modified relatively easily to challenge higher or lower level characters, and all are short enough to be finished in a single gaming session. As such, while they will be challenges, players should not necessarily expect to go up a level each time they encounter the Merithians. Instead, the greatest gain comes from the increasing depth of their game world. Most importantly, the adventures all feel like they would be fun to play for player and Dungeon Master alike. Wilson also includes a short list of adventure ideas for DM who want to create new adventures using the Merithians.

The new magic, magic items, and prestige class are interesting and different without being unbalancing. The Merithians used a form of magic that infused the magic into themselves. Thus their magic armor bonds with the wearer and requires knowing the proper command word to remove, Their Red Magic becomes a part of them, (similar to the casting system used by the Sorcerer class and the spell-like ability of certain monsters), and Bloodscrolls predictably require some of the caster's blood. The Prestige Class - the Centurion Knight - exemplifies the Merithian virtue of self-perfection. Like most Prestige Classes, the Centurion Knight provides several powerful abilities. Those

introduced here are not extreme but Dungeon Masters should, as always, make certain they understand the rules here before introducing it into their campaign.

The five new monsters are constructs and haunting spirits directly related to the adventures. PC magicians interested in creating golems will love what they find here. In fact, this is one of the best things about the supplement . . . there is something here for all of the character classes.

The only problem I have with this supplement is the artwork. Paul Harmon's cover leaves me cold. While some of the internal artwork, done by Kieran Yanner, is as good as you will find anywhere, there is some unevenness in the proportions of the figures, and an almost Goya-like elongation of the faces is especially noticeable (you thought that Art Appreciation course would never come in handy!). The maps are clean and readable and done in the *3rd Edition* style. Old school *D&D* players may miss having the interior cover used for maps - a better use of space, perhaps, than using internal pages - but they are well done.

In the end, *Wonders Out of Time* is a very well-done supplement, and definitely worth the money. I am especially impressed with how well the Merithian culture is explored and the variety of ways Wilson uses it. The adventures are short enough to play quickly, and linking them will provide depth to any *d20* campaign. Although converting this supplement will take some time and effort, gamers using different game systems may want to look at *Wonders Out of Time*, as the ideas will translate over easily into any generic fantasy world.

--*Matthew M. DeForrest*

Passenger Artillery

A Means of Travel for any Steampunk Campaign

by Joe Taylor

(Launch gun and shell designs by Chris Taylor)

Transcontinental Cargo/Passenger Artillery

There is something quintessentially "steampunkish" and Victorian about excessively large artillery pieces. The Lunar Shell and Verne Cannon described in *GURPS Steampunk* and *GURPS Castle Falkenstein* participate in a tradition which ranges from Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* to the real Paris Gun of WWI. The idea of using cannons as a means of transportation (either for passengers or cargo) is not limited to speculative fiction; many scientists have given such a system serious thought, especially as a means of launching satellites into orbit. As far as role-playing games are concerned, a working artillery transportation system adds instant steampunk flavor to any campaign setting.

This article describes a hypothetical pair of "passenger guns" and its variations. Though it is a terrific mode of transportation for a cinematic game, the system described below needs no cinematic manipulations to work. It could be included even in a campaign that adheres strictly to realism and physical laws. The cargo shell requires only late TL 5 components and artillery concepts, though applied on a grand scale. The passenger shell requires one TL (5+1) item to be possible: an "advanced" solid rocket booster, fueled with a nitrocellulose/nitroglycerin mixture. A TL (5+n) drug treatment to temporarily increase the passengers' acceleration tolerance would also be useful, but is not necessary (anything that will keep the passengers sedated will do).

The system described below is one developed to transport cargo and passengers between Britain and India. It consists of two guns, each specifically built to "hit" their particular target. Shells fired from the British gun splash down in the Arabian Sea west of India; the Indian gun sends its shells to the Celtic Sea off Britain. In order to be complete, the transportation system also requires the use of recovery vessels at the splashdown sites to locate and retrieve the shells. The passenger and cargo shells themselves differ in their construction and operation; the passenger shell requires the assistance of a TL (5+1) rocket booster.

The Guns

The transcontinental artillery pieces have smoothbore barrels with a bore of 8 feet. Instead of having one large powder charge located behind the shell, these guns use numerous charges located in secondary barrels that feed into the main barrel every thirty yards. These secondary barrels fire into the main barrel immediately after the shell passes it. This design allows a much more gradual and controlled acceleration of the shell down the gun barrel while providing a much higher muzzle velocity than could ordinarily be obtained with guncotton. The specific guns described below are built fixed in place and cannot traverse (but see "Military Uses" below). Water pipes along the barrel cool the gun after each firing and provide process steam and heating for the support facility. Large doors at the muzzle of the gun are sealed before the main barrel is cooled, so that the cooling process will lower the air pressure in the barrel, easing the shell's high speed trip through the barrel. These doors are blown open by the shockwaves preceding the shell just before the shell exits the gun.

The British gun, nicknamed "Big Ben," has a 4-mile long barrel and is located near Ft. William, Scotland, where the gun's support crew is housed. The muzzle stands 5,400 ft. above sea level, against the peak of Mt. Ben Nevis, while the other end is sunk in a 2,500-ft. deep shaft. Ft. Williams is also home to a state-of-the-art (for TL 5) chemical plant for the production of propellants for the gun and solid rocket boosters, a dedicated shipping hub for "gun cargo," and a special Post Office branch to sort and pack priority "shell mail" letters from all over Great Britain. An observatory has been built on Mt. Ben Nevis to track the trajectories of outgoing flights. "Big Ben's" trajectory takes shells over the

North Sea, northern Germany, southeastern Russia, and Persia before splashdown in the Arabian Sea.

The Indian gun, nicknamed the "Orient Express," has a 4.2-mile long barrel and is located near Pathankot in northern India. In addition to support facilities similar to the Ft. Williams site, the Indian gun is also guarded by a regiment-sized garrison. The "Orient Express" goes over southeastern Russia, the Caspian Sea, Germany, the Netherlands, and Southern England to land in the Celtic Sea.

The Passenger Shell

The Passenger Shell is actually composed of two sections: the passenger vehicle at the front of the shell, and a large solid rocket booster to provide additional, controlled acceleration. This vehicle can transport six passengers between the British Isles and the Indian subcontinent in the space of an hour, at a level of risk comparable to that of a long sea voyage.

The passenger vehicle is a metal capsule 8 feet in diameter, 12 feet long, weighing 3.7 tons unloaded. It is shaped like a short, fat artillery shell. The interior contains two three-person acceleration couches and a chemical rebreather good for 12 man-days. There is 1.5 cf. and 15 lbs. of cargo room available under each seat (passengers may have the rest of their baggage sent via cargo shell on a different flight). The acceleration couches require the passengers to be strapped tightly in place so that they have almost no freedom of movement; the interior is very cramped and is not lit. These difficult accommodations are not a problem as the passengers are ordinarily sedated before the trip (see "The Trip," below).

To permit a safe descent of the passengers through the atmosphere, the passenger shell has a heat shield made of white oak on its base, and a cluster of three parachutes deployed by barometric switches when the falling capsule reaches 30,000 ft. The switches also activate a set of smoke generators to aid in the location and recovery of the vehicle. All critical actuators and switches have redundant systems and only two of the parachutes need to deploy properly for a safe splashdown.

The rocket booster portion is basically a 130-ft. long, 8-ft. diameter, 300-ton solid rocket motor. The booster relies on fold-out stabilizers augmented by a simple gyro/jet vane control system for stability. The booster has its own heat shield, smoke generator, and parachute system to allow it to survive reentry and be recovered, though it experiences a hotter and more violent reentry than the passenger portion of the vehicle. An ordinance-based actuator closes the nozzle exit of the rocket booster after it ceases firing so that it will remain floating after splashdown.

It is the addition of the rocket booster that allows safe, realistic travel via the guns. If the shell were fired from the gun with enough force to send it halfway around the world, the g forces would crush any normal human passengers. Therefore, the passenger shell is fired at a velocity low enough to be safe, and relies upon the rocket booster to provide the extra push needed to reach its destination. This system requires the biggest leap in Victorian innovation of the entire project. If the GM wishes to remove it, realistic cargo transportation is still possible, but passenger travel would require a cinematic solution to the effects of extreme acceleration.

The Cargo Shell

The cargo shell is 18 ft. long, 8 ft. in diameter, and weighs 16.7 tons. Its structure is heavily reinforced so that it can be fired at a higher acceleration than the passenger shell, and it requires no rocket booster to achieve transcontinental range. The shell has a cargo capacity of 6 tons and 600 cubic feet. Fragile, shock-sensitive, or heat-sensitive items (including live animals) should not be sent by cargo shell. All cargo must be securely packed to avoid damage or shifting in flight.

If enough cargo shots are fired over the course of several days, the amount of material sent between Britain and India could be comparable to that delivered by a single cargo ship during the same amount of time, though the operation would be far more expensive. Using transcontinental artillery for transporting materials in bulk is not very practical. However, if an item absolutely, positively needs to get to its destination as quickly as possible, the cargo shell is the

way to go. Its most useful application is transporting documents and "shell mail." This would greatly increase the transmission of information between Britain and the most prized part of its empire. Alternatively, given the effort and expense it would take to build the Transcontinental Cannons, in a campaign world the guns might take the place of another large-scale engineering project: the Suez Canal. Without the canal, sea routes to India become far longer, more expensive, and dangerous, making the guns a more cost-effective alternative.

Care and Feeding of Transcontinental Artillery

Operating one of the guns requires a crew of 500 men. This figure does not include the sizeable support staff that maintains the gun, services the passengers, recovers and refits the shells, packs cargo, predicts the weather, or any of the other countless functions that must be completed for the transportation system to work properly. With the operation running at its maximum rate, passenger shells can be fired every 45 minutes and cargo shells every 30 minutes. Firing the gun for a passenger shot consumes approximately 75 tons of powder charges in addition to the rocket booster's propellants; a cargo shot uses 150 tons. Before any shells are fired each day a small 25-ton "blank" charge is burned to preheat the barrel. The cost is \$27,612 for a passenger shot and \$7,160 for a cargo shot (adjusted for 19th century prices). This includes consumables, recovery and refurbishment of the shells and boosters, direct labor, overhead, and capital depreciation.

This expensive method of travel is mostly used for official government business, but one-way passenger tickets are available for \$5,000, and shipping cargo costs \$0.60/lb or \$11.93/cf. Due to extra handling, "shell mail" costs eight cents for a half-ounce letter.

The guns' hours of operation depend upon when it is daylight in the recovery area. Due to the time difference between Britain and India, that does not necessarily mean it is day at the firing gun. The Indian gun can typically operate between noon and 8pm local time, while the British gun can operate between 4am and noon local time -- though flights before 7am are unusual. (Even so, it is difficult to oversleep in Ft. Williams.) Passenger shots are usually the first shots of the day, as that gives the most hours of daylight possible for recovery operations if a shell goes astray.

The Trip

A typical passenger trip on the Transcontinental Cannon begins the day before the launch with a medical examination by one of the facility's doctors. Passengers with HT below 8 or any serious medical disadvantages will not be allowed to travel by cannon if their ill health is detected by the doctor. Women in good health are permitted to travel by cannon, but may find themselves politely discouraged from taking such a violent form of transit. The passengers and any cargo they wish to carry will be weighed at this time to plan the packing arrangements for the shell. The doctor will advise the passengers not to eat between the exam and the shot, to get to sleep early that night, and to avoid wearing their best garments for the trip. They will then be offered a tour of the gun facility and of the shell they will travel in. When the passengers arrive at the cannon for their flight, they will first be encouraged to "make water." (If passengers ignore the advice, they will probably find that they have soiled themselves during transit.) The passengers will then be seated in wheelchairs and sedated. The next thing they should experience is the odor of smelling salts and the voice of the recovery ship's surgeon welcoming them to the Indies.

If one were to be awake during the trip, the experience would be quite different. After leaving the departure lounge, the passengers are wheeled to the waiting shell and strapped into the acceleration couches. The restraints allow almost no freedom of movement. Once the access hatch is closed, the inside of the shell is totally dark. Loading the passenger shell into the gun takes half an hour. Launch occurs with a sudden jolt followed by an excruciating 14 gs of acceleration for nine seconds. Passengers strapped securely in their seats must make a HT roll at -6; if they are not secure, the roll is at -20. If the HT roll is failed, roll on the Acceleration Effects Table on pp. CII131. (It is expected that most passengers will fail this roll, but if securely strapped in they should only black out for a few seconds -- not a problem to anyone who is already sedated. At worst, on a critical failure a person of average HT would take 1d+1 damage.) After the initial launch, the acceleration drops to a more tolerable 3 gs for three more minutes. After the solid rocket booster burns out, explosive actuators separate the booster from the shell. Any conscious occupant would experience a slight jolt and then the capsule begins spinning in a slow roll as springs further separate the two sections.

For the next 50 minutes the passenger would experience a weightless, falling sensation. As the shell descends into the atmosphere again, aerodynamic forces flip the passenger shell so it is travelling base-end first. The deceleration forces then build up over the next five minutes until the passengers are experiencing almost 8 gs (passengers must roll at HT-1 to avoid acceleration effects, HT-8 if not strapped in). During reentry, the walls of the passenger capsule will heat up to around 120 degrees F and the air temperature will rise to almost 100 degrees. Over the next two minutes, g forces rapidly drop until they are almost a normal 1 g when the barometric switches deploy the parachute cluster. After parachute deployment, the capsule swings freely under the parachutes for 25 minutes until it splashes down. The shell would then float base down in a rolling sea for up to three hours before one of the recovery ships locates it and brings it on board.

Anyone awake during the trip would be required to roll a Fright Check. Any character with a fear of darkness, drowning, enclosed spaces, falling, or loud noises would roll at an appropriate penalty (possibly several times during the course of the trip). The trip is also very taxing; whether the passengers were conscious or not, they lose 1 point of fatigue, plus 1 more for every 5 points they failed their HT rolls by.

What Can Go Wrong?

As it is described above, transcontinental artillery represents a mature, well-tested system. As long as everything works properly, this method of travel is fairly safe. However, severe failures in just about any part of the system could quickly be fatal for passengers. Minor gun misfires or booster malfunctions could cause the shell to fall short of its intended destination without otherwise harming the passengers. One of the most feared (and most likely) problems is a passenger capsule being lost at sea. To prevent this, shots are canceled when poor visibility is anticipated over the recovery area. Considering the limits of TL 5 meteorology and communications, however, it is entirely possible for an unexpected storm to hit the recovery area during operations.

Any skill rolls made while inside the shell would be at a penalty due to total darkness. The restraint harness is very restrictive and an Escape roll to get out of it is at -3. The shell's hatch is not designed to be opened from the inside without proper tools, though inventive passengers may improvise something that would work.

Military Uses

Just because the guns can't be moved doesn't mean that they can't be retargeted. Rocket thrusters or aerodynamic forces can be used to alter the shells' trajectories so they could bombard targets not directly in line with their normal flight path. The guns would not be accurate enough for precision strikes, but they could be an effective terror weapon. The cities the British gun should be able to hit include: Hamburg, Warsaw, Kiev, T'bilisi, and Tehran. The cities the Indian gun could hit are: Kiev, Warsaw, Prague, Berlin, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Paris, and London. It would require several ranging shots (reported by spies acting as forward observers) to hit even a city-sized target.

In addition to bombardment, cargo shells could be used to resupply isolated units. Passenger shells could be used to insert spies or elite troops into foreign countries.

Other Developments

The fun doesn't stop there; once this transportation system is built, it can be put to other uses. A cargo shell, modified to carry scientific instruments and cameras could bring back the first films showing Earth from space. The development of radio would surely see locator beacons built into the shells to aid in recovery. In conjunction with aerodynamic controls, a shell could even be made to home in on a radio signal -- which has both civilian and military uses. Fold-out wings could be added to allow a shell to glide for longer distances -- perhaps even at the control of a human pilot.

Other nations may build passenger cannons of their own. One could easily imagine a system connecting America's East and West coasts, or perhaps a trio of guns connecting New York, New Orleans, and San Francisco. Transatlantic

artillery could connect the Old and New Worlds. The British Empire could add another link between India and Australia, and perhaps a Ft. Williams-Quebec-Vancouver route as well. Germany, well-known for its developments in artillery and early rocket science, wouldn't have enough important colonial holdings to make building an artillery route to them cost effective -- though they might try anyway. Artillery routes that go into either Germany or Russia might splash down in the Baltic Sea, giving those two powers something else to squabble over. In landlocked countries (or colonies), large artificial lakes may be built to give the shells a convenient place to splash down, or the shells could be redesigned to for a hard landing on solid ground (violent, but less jarring than the initial launch). As the guns will be several miles long and the barrel exits need to be above as much of the atmosphere as possible, they are best built up the sides of gently sloping mountains. The Alps could become a hub for guns firing out of Europe. Constructing one on a flat plain would add considerable difficulty, but might be accomplished by supporting the barrel with balloons or aerostats.

Shooting the Moon

Of course, sooner or later, someone will want to point one of these things at the moon. A moon gun of the type described by Jules Verne would require a muzzle velocity over three times that of the guns detailed here. Just putting shells in orbit would require a muzzle velocity almost twice that of the Transcontinental Cannons. Simply using a lighter, sabot shell will not allow cargo to be fired directly to orbit, because the propellant molecular weight of gunpowder or guncotton products is just too high to push shells to that velocity. Direct cannon launch to orbit or the moon would require radically different propellant and/or gun designs that probably would not be available until late TL (5+1). If developed, however, particularly good sites for such a space gun would be the island of Hawaii and the Pegunungan Maoke mountains in New Guinea.

Even though the Transcontinental Cannons cannot put shells directly into orbit, they could still be used as part of a space launch system when combined with more advanced rocket boosted shells. If the problems associated with launching a rocket at high g-forces could be surmounted, an expendable solid rocket filled cargo shell should be capable of reaching low Earth orbit with 1,000 lbs. of payload. A 305-ton passenger shell-style rocket-boosted vehicle consisting of three expendable stages could put a manned capsule weighing three tons into low Earth orbit.

Cinematic Versions

The Transcontinental Cannons described above were designed for those who prefer to adhere to the laws of physics but want something grandly overbuilt in their campaign world, anyway. If your game is more cinematic, or you don't mind ignoring certain bits of reality if it would make your campaign cool, then you have even more options.

As mentioned above, a cinematic game could do away with the rocket booster and still use the passenger shells. In fact, this would actually make the passenger shots cheaper! Without the need for a rocket booster, the price of a passenger ticket goes down to a mere \$1,350. Rather than simply ignoring g forces, the same effect can be accomplished with the invention of a cinematic anti-acceleration treatment. However you do away with the stress of g forces, it would also make the trip less debilitating. PCs could step out of the shell none the worse for wear, feeling fresh and ready for adventure.

In a very cinematic game, the guns could be made much smaller and would be able to change position, allowing them to send passengers and cargo to many more locations. The guns could be expanded into a world-wide (or at least Empire-wide) system of travel, with passenger and cargo cannons as common as airports today. Super-intelligent calculating engines could increase precision and give the cannons pin-point accuracy. Rather than splashing down in the sea, perhaps hard landings are routine. Etheric shock propellants, geothermally generated steam, magnetic cannons, and other such technobabble could be used to alter any aspect of the transcontinental artillery system to the GM's satisfaction.

Transcontinental Artillery in *GURPS Castle Falkenstein*

The world of *Castle Falkenstein* already has the Verne Cannon, so Transcontinental Cannons would only be raising the ante. With the French gun as inspiration, it follows that the British would try to build a super-cannon of their own (perhaps kicking off an arms race). With the Nautilus and French submersibles posing a threat to British shipping, securing an alternative route to India could be vital in the event of a war or a blockade of the Suez Canal. Though built for transportation, the guns also serve as a counter to the Verne Cannon; the Indian gun could shell Paris without fear of retaliation. Of course, should Nemo or some Criminal Mastermind seize the cannon, it could also be used to threaten London!

Finally, in a game world where the fate of a nation could hang on the actions of a single individual, the ability to send that hero to his or her destination as quickly as possible might make more difference than a boatload of soldiers.

Using the Guns in a Campaign

The design and construction of the Transcontinental Cannons could be a heroic engineering project for technical or business-oriented characters. The guns (or foreign copies) will be likely targets of sabotage and espionage both during and after construction. If the guns are being built by a private group, obstacles like uncooperative landowners or politicians may need to be dealt with. The existence of the guns may open up new business opportunities for merchants.

The guns can also be used as a vehicle (literally) for getting the characters into an adventure. Besides their normal destinations, an unusual misfire of a passenger shell could send its occupants to another country, an otherwise inaccessible Lost World, outer space, alternate realities, or the afterlife. The characters could even be unsuspecting locals who have a lost shell suddenly drop into their community.

Adventure Seeds

Search and Rescue

A shell containing important passengers or cargo has gone missing, and the PCs are agents sent to recover it. The passenger could be an important diplomat, a military hero, a beautiful princess, or a group of all three. Valuable cargo could include treasure, artifacts, secret documents, or a technological McGuffin. If the shell went down in a particularly remote part of the world (see "The Guns" for locations along the shell's trajectory), just reaching it could be an adventure. When the PCs reach it, the passengers or cargo may no longer be there -- taken, perhaps, by locals or rival agents. If a passenger shell goes down in the Himalayans, surviving passengers could wander into the lost city of Shangri-La -- and may be unwilling to leave! Alternatively, the PCs could be agents of another foreign power, seeking to locate the shell and its contents before the rightful owners do.

Rebellion

An uprising in India threatens to overwhelm the garrison in Pathankot and seize the cannon there. Players could be British soldiers, either part of the trapped garrison trying to hold out or a relief column marching through hostile territory to secure the gun. Diplomats or agents could be shot over from Britain to deal with the uprising. The PCs could also play members of the rebellion attempting to seize the gun. Once the British garrison is wiped out, a split develops among the rebels. One faction wants to negotiate, using the gun as a bargaining chip, and another intends to use it as a weapon against England and force the crown to recognize an independent Indian state. As the tension grows between the leaders of the uprising, a column of British soldiers marches closer to recapture the cannon. Meanwhile, the rebels also have to figure out how to operate the gun without accidentally blowing it -- and themselves -- to bits.

Fantastic Flight

While traveling via transcontinental artillery (perhaps as test passengers for a gun-launched space capsule), the PCs are exposed to a burst of cosmic radiation. Upon landing, they have been changed in unusual ways, gaining strange powers

and abilities.

A Mysterious Occurrence

A passenger shell is launched from India with a full complement on board. When it is recovered, however, the shell is empty! The flight was on target and on time -- nothing seemed to go wrong. Another shell launched the same day from Britain comes down with all its passengers safe and sound . . . but it is observed splashing down a full six hours after it was launched. The PCs set out to investigate these mysteries, either for personal reasons or because they are directed to. They begin hearing reports of strange lights in the sky and visits by odd men. If the investigation is official, the PCs are under pressure to clear up the matter quickly before the government decides to shut down passenger flights. If the investigation is a private effort, they are discouraged, lest they uncover something which would make gun travel seem unsafe. Either way, one case of abduction and one of missing time is surely just the tip of the iceberg.

Vehicle Statistics

Passenger Shell

Subassemblies: Body +4 *Cargo:* 9cf *Power and Propulsion:* None *Occupancy:* 6 cramped g-seats *Armor:* F 3/5, RL 3/5, B 3/5, T 3/5, U 3/5+heat shield*

*Treat heat shield as 3/6 wood armor. Heat shield is destroyed during reentry. *Size:* 12' x 8' diameter. *Payload:* 1,290lbs. *Lwt.:* 8,745lbs. *Volume:* 492cf *Size Mod:* +4 *Price:* \$1,870 *HT:* 12 *HP:* 1,200[Body]
Sealed, waterproof hull.

Rocket Booster

Subassemblies: Body +7

Cargo: None

Power and Propulsion: Solid fuel rocket, 774,937 lbs of thrust for 3 minutes.

Occupancy: None

Armor: F 2/2, RL 2/2, B 2/2, T 2/2+heat shield*, U 2/2

*Treat heat shield as 3/6 wood armor. Heat shield is destroyed during reentry.

Size: 130' x 8' diameter.

Payload: None

Lwt.: 602,994 lbs.

Burnout weight: 66,499lbs.

Volume: 6,535 cf.

Size Mod: +7

Price: \$34,067

HT: 6

HP: 6,000 [Body]

Waterproof, floatation hull.

(Designer's Notes: This booster was designed as a real solid rocket booster using double-base propellant and 10% structure weight to give the Passenger Shell a 6,500km suborbital range. The conceptual design was then converted to GURPS Vehicle stats.)

Cargo Shell

Subassemblies: Body +4

Cargo: 600cf

Power and Propulsion: None

Occupancy: None

Armor: F 4/18, RL 4/18, B 4/18, T 4/18+heat shield*, U 4/18

*Treat heat shield as 4/35 wood armor. Heat shield is destroyed during reentry.

Size: 18' x 8' diameter.

Payload: 12,000lbs.

Lwt.: 33,119lbs.

Volume: 721cf.

SizeMod: +4

Price: \$4,527

HT: 12

HP: 3,000 [Body]

Sealed, waterproof hull.

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Room With a View . . . Or At Least A Spot For Your Soda

Yesterday I began playing in a *Changeling* game, and all in all I ended up having a good time. But there was one challenge to the session that got me to thinking . . . one of those basic points that I think is worth some discussion. So as long as I've been getting somewhat above-average ratings by discussing the obvious, I thought I'd continue this trend.

Anyway, the physical room where we were packed in was *much* too small. There were six players and a GM in a one-bedroom apartment's living room. There was only one coaster; at any given time the rest of us needed to hold our drinks. Nineteen clowns pulled up in a Volkswagen Beetle, took one look at us, and said, "Whoa! No room for us!" in unison.

We were cramped.

Now, while I could just say, "Don't stuff too many folks into your gaming space," and copy/paste the ingredients off a Fudge Dipped Chocolate Chip Chewy Granola Bar for my remaining 991 words, that would probably get me ratings almost as low as a CCG article. So here are some random thoughts regarding the actual physical space we game in.

Space

If you're stacked in the gaming area like cordwood, then that's an obvious problem. But the opposite of too much space can be a problem, as well. I ran some sessions in a large room on campus one time, and it seemed to have everything that gamers could want. Lots of tables, lots of lighting . . . even a dry-erase board.

Unfortunately, the tables were *too* big, and the logical place where I plonked myself as a GM -- the front of the room -- ended up being too impersonal and distant from where the tables were placed initially. So it felt like I was teaching my gamers instead of running a game for them:

"Now if you open your *Player's Handbook* to page 27, you'll see today's lesson. Matt, keep your eyes on your own character sheet . . ."

I suspect that part of this problem was the fact that these rooms in campus originally had some other purpose; I'm not sure what, exactly, but it seems to have something to do with all those "teachers", "professors", and "classes" I hear about . . .

Anyway, you need to have "enough" space. What does that mean? Each person should have his own spot to sit (not necessarily a chair), and a place for their stuff (generally a place to place a character sheet and roll dice). Perhaps most importantly, each person should be able to move around each *other* person; if all players have to tuck their knees under their chins each time someone needs to use the restroom, then there's a problem.

(As an aside, make sure to let folks know before play where restrooms, kitchens, and other gamerly needs are. Nothing disrupts that climactic interaction with Lord Soth more than announcing you need to pee . . . unless that was [intentional](#).)

While rooms can often be creatively rearranged to be made more gamer-friendly, this isn't always possible. Unfortunately, the university room we were in couldn't be *made* suitable for gaming; even when we moved the tables closer to each other, rearranged desks, and tried other tricks, it still didn't work. I may never know why, but in hindsight it may have something to do with these other points below.

Room To Pace

Depending on the number of players and the style of play, even *more* room may be necessary. If there are only two or three players, they may well want to heighten their own dramatic interactions by moving around the room or otherwise making more use of the physical space. (Most playing areas are too small for more than three or four players at most to be able to move freely.) Likewise make sure that the GM has enough room . . . whatever that is. I tend to be a spastic pace-around-the-room leap-at-my-players kind of GM, so I need to make sure I have enough space for my theatrics. (The GM screen for me is mostly a good place to remember where my dice are.) Again, you want to be careful of having too much room, but giving your players some additional avenues of roleplaying is always good.

Lighting

Other advice on this topic will say "enough" light; I usually modify that to "appropriate" light. Depending on the circumstances, too much light can be as big a problem as too little. That university room I was in had ample light; unfortunately, it was all unfriendly fluorescent light. While fluorescent light has been good in my experience for "modern" games (like supers, espionage, or sci-fi), it tends to do be too harsh and impersonal for me with many genres. For games like fantasy, *World of Darkness*, and horror I prefer incandescent lights and (especially) candles. Really, there aren't many pre-modern games that *aren't* helped with the flickering shadows of candlelight. And don't forget the power of blowing out a candle at a dramatically appropriate time . . .

Acoustics & Audible Problems

If I needed to chalk up one insidious reason why the university room didn't work, it would be the acoustics. Simply talking in there *felt* like a classroom. While, again, some campaigns may well benefit from this (I'd *love* to run a *GURPS IOU* game in such a place, for example), most won't.

My old apartment also had an echo point; for some reason, speaking in one specific place in the room would echo loudly. As a result I just avoided pacing past that spot while GMing. That old apartment was also close to a main road, so the sounds of the street would often bother us. To counteract this I would turn on the air conditioning's fan; at least then it was a constant noise folks could ignore. (Of course, then the room sounded like the bridge of the *Enterprise-D* . . .)

Unfortunately, acoustics are the biggest problem I've had when I've gamed outside. My players and I simply can't hear each other most of the time. Whether this is because of a lack of walls for sound to bounce off, the inevitable noises of the outdoors, the fact that everyone is distracted because we're outdoors ("The dayball! Gamers see not the dayball! It BURNSSSSSSSS!!! *Hisssss* . . ."), or something else, I'm not sure. And if anyone has any tips for how they *were* able to tabletop game outside, I'd love to hear 'em.

Temperature

This one would seem to be a no-brainer ("Adjust the temperature so everyone's comfortable, moron!"), but it's a bit more complicated than that. Why? Because temperature comfort levels vary from person to person. While 75 degrees is a perfect temperature for some folks, it's much too nippy for others. (It's also much too warm for our Celsius-loving readers . . .) Look for ways that players can make themselves comfortable; blankets, afghans, or hot cocoa let folks warm up, while positioning warmer players by windows or AC vents can let them stay cooler. (Of course, the university room we were in was set at a perennial 72 degrees . . . perfect if you've got a room full of sweaty students, not-so-good if you've got four guys huddled around a huge metal and wood table.

Well, I'm sure there are other environmental concerns that I've forgotten; maybe I'll do a sequel at some point. But in the interim, if you're wondering why your players aren't having much fun in the freezing, cramped, over-lit deafening warehouse closet you're meeting in, now you may have a clue as to why.

(And if you have any tips or any other comments, feel free as ever to send them [my way](#).)

* * *

It looks like John Kovalic is still having GAMA fun, and Ken Hite is busy as well (although we *did* have some Hite-y goodness with his *GURPS Cabal* and *Horror* designer's notes. Hopefully both gentlemen will come home to us soon.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: Dungeons & Dragons Adventure Game (2000) Adventure Book, p. 2.

(Two stars) ". . . well, not exactly a machine, but a creature of inhuman cyberintelligence and unholy hungers, with tentacles, claws, and a never-blinking eye . . ."

The Pythagoras Box

by Elizabeth McCoy

There is an ancient mathematical joke . . .

There were three American Indian squaws. One slept on a deer skin. One slept on an elk skin and the third slept on a hippopotamus skin. All three became pregnant. The first two each had a boy, and the one who slept on the hippopotamus skin had twin boys. This goes to prove that the squaw of the hippopotamus is equal to the sons of the squaws of the other two hides.

This is apparently the basis of the Pythagorus Box (or vice versa?), which is actually three boxes, connected together so that a right triangle (i.e., one where the largest "point" is a 90-degree angle) is in the center. The two smaller, leather-covered boxes are large enough to hold an average human, while the one which appears to be covered in hippopotamus hide is correspondingly larger. (The GM may, of course, alter the size of the boxes as desired. Indeed, the boxes may alter their *own* sizes randomly . . .)

The Pythagorus Box's creation is likely to be a great mystery -- if for no other reason than that it's got an inherently *silly* premise. (In *GURPS Illuminati University*, it was probably created by Pun Magic (p. IOU115); in *In Nomine*, consider the effects of a Divine Intervention and an Infernal Intervention at the same time and what that says about the sense of humor of Lucifer and the Almighty; in *Teenagers from Outer Space*, someone probably built it during Shop Class and won't 'fess up.) Nevertheless, it is a potent artifact.

Not only is it able to duplicate items, but the Pythagorus Box can even create life.

This ability can be as silly, whimsical, bland, impressive, or horrific as the GM desires, depending on the requirements for activation and the results. The basic ability is thus: place a living thing in each of the two smaller boxes, invoke the Box, and the "hippo box" will contain "the sum of the other two hides." (The exact meaning of this depends on the box -- see below.)

Some suggested activation rituals: Simply feed it some power (Essence, fatigue, Gnosis, Bonk, plug it into a wall socket, etc.); spill blood within the triangle the boxes form -- a few drops is enough; burn rare herbs within the triangle; place a gemstone within the triangle, which will vaporize immediately; sacrifice someone within the triangle in a non-fatal, silly way (TFOS Bonk or Toon Falling Down); "sacrifice" a virgin in a non-fatal way; pour three pints of blood into the triangle (Red Cross may disapprove of thieves); kill something of the same mass as the intended result. (Or perhaps the two creatures which are to be "summed" in the hippo box must be freshly killed before being placed in the other two boxes!)

With a small Box, easy invocation, and simple "addition," one is likely to only create a series of apparently-cloned rabbits or mice -- which might be useful if you're stranded on a desert island and need to eat something! Placing candy bars inside it will cut down on trips to the vending machine, too.

For sillier effects, the box is small, activation is trivial, and you get . . . roughly what the two other things in the box would produce if they could have viable offspring. A rabbit and a rat might produce a bunny with a long ratty tail and a taste for cheese; a pigeon and a spider could get a little troubling. (This could shade into horrific, depending on how much the resulting creature favors the "cute'n'cuddly" combination.) A cheerleader and a tiger might cause a cat-girl to wake up . . . hopefully with a personality more suited to school than the zoo.

(For very silly, or very disturbing, results, the Box acts more like the transport chambers in *The Fly* -- a composite being with (for PCs) a split personality is produced.)

Likewise shading closer to something troubling, but with ridiculous potential, is the possibility that a non-animate and animate subject can also blend. Didn't you ever want a dog with the ability to pop toast?

The Box becomes more disturbing -- and inconvenient -- if the hippo box produces a baby of the appropriate melding. It might be a great way to help couples have children, but what's the ultimate price for creating life? Is the child really . . . human? The theological questions about the presence and nature of its soul might get troublesome. And who knows what strange powers or habits the child might manifest as it grows up?

In a Silly setting, the Pythagorus Box can easily heighten the silliness. In a more serious campaign -- it's only silly on the outside, and failing to think through the consequences of what it does, instead of how it looks, can be tragic.

Possible Adventure Seeds

- An evil necromancer has gained possession of the Box, and is creating monstrous semi-dead creatures by putting two creatures -- one dead and the other alive -- into the Box. The result is large, semi-dead (thus controllable by the mad mage's spells), more sturdy and cunning than regular undead, and terrorizing the locals. Some of the victims are humans, too, which means the PCs may want to see if they can cause the Pythagorus Box to *divide* the victims. But first, that means obtaining the Box . . .
- In a modern setting, the Box is being used to counterfeit money -- the *serial numbers* are even "summed" arcanelly, making tracking the forged bills more difficult. Mundane investigators may discover the Box in the forgers' lair instead of the expected printing press, or private investigators who know about the occult may be sent to recover the Box for their mysterious employer.
- Precursor artifacts and nanotech -- the Box seemed to be a perfectly good curiosity to the prospector who found it and auctioned it off. But the Box is *adding* genetic data every time its amoral, decadent owner uses it. Soon, the experiments will have human-level intelligence, and strange abilities -- and a yen to return . . . "home." (And if the experiments in question are not PCs, they've probably also got little berserking problems, too.)
- At IOU, a student has a wonderful little scam going: buy high-marked papers from other students, put them in the Pythagorus Box, and take out a copy that blends the styles! Okay, so it has to be checked for grammar and punctuation afterward, but it's a small price to pay. These "new" papers can then be sold to other students, as needed. Naturally, rumors of this have reached some teachers and administration, who are not impressed; if enough overreaction is achieved, Campus Security might even raid the dorm where they *think* the Box is kept! (The PCs have the "Lives on Campus" disadvantage, right?)
- Never let trickster gods get drunk together; while most *In Nomine* celestials would like to blame the Box on Eli or Vapula, it's not either of their faults. The Box shrinks and expands at its not-really-sapient whim, and tends to wind up in the *oddest* places. Right now, it's in the hands of a pair of demons who are trying to generate an army of demonlings . . .
- For *Discworld*, the Box is made from Sapient Pearwood, and will wander about on its own, looking for its (unknown? predestined?) Owner. It also tends to eat things with the smaller boxes and burp out the merged results . . . Naturally, it's going to encounter the PCs, and -- if the characters don't start following it around -- pick one of them as an Owner. (Of *course* this means that people are going to show up on its trail, to try to steal it or just find someone to pay for the damages it's caused.)

Nuance and the Static Curtain

Two (Very) Minor Players In The Greater Game

by Alice Turow

Nuance

*We claim to be a nation of laws, and this is true enough. We are, arguably, nothing **but** a nation of laws. With enough laws, we reach the point where only the most saintly or knowledgeable can hope to be in compliance. Given enough legislation, it will be possible for those with power to arrest **anyone** they want, provided they dig deep enough.*

This ends now; I break the law, and encourage others to do so, as well.

- Swear during your cell phone calls.
- Record a football game for your personal use without the express written consent of the NFL.
- Have sex in ways forbidden by your state's statutes.

When we are all law-breakers, the notion of breaking the law becomes meaningless.

--Excerpt from "The Nuance Manifesto," published in the March 31st *Washington Post*

The vigilante known as Nuance was born on October 19, 1964 as Clint Davin. Described by friends as "intelligent and intense," Clint married college sweetheart Mindy Sharpe in 1986 and ultimately became a successful and wealthy lawyer. The two of them were respected and well-liked (albeit private) members of the community in their home city. Unfortunately, the idyllic situation could not last. In 1991 Mindy was in an automobile accident, and was taken to the emergency room. Clint received the call from the hospital and left work immediately to be at her side. Unfortunately, he was traveling too fast and was pulled over by the police. Compounding Clint's problems were two parking tickets from three years earlier that had slipped his attention; a warrant had been placed for his arrest, as a routine license check showed. By the time the matter was resolved and Clint was able to get to the hospital, it was too late; Mindy Davin had died.

Clint spent several years in a depressive state, barely able to maintain (let alone advance) his previous life. Then one day a case was brought to his firm that snapped him out of it. Senator Kelly Fine wanted to sue the federal government for her husband's wrongful death. She claimed that highly placed officials in the federal bureaucracy were using the IRS to get at her and her husband Frank Robbin, since her senatorial seat was hotly contested. Frank had spent his fourth day in a row answering tax audit questions, and was on his third evening with less than two hours of sleep a night. With the prospect of another day of interrogation the next day, fatigue finally won; Frank (seemingly) fell asleep at the wheel and crashed into an embankment.

Clint took the case, and things seemed to progress reasonably well. Unfortunately, the case was thrown out on a technicality a year to the day it was filed. Although Senator Fine understood and was grateful he had helped as much as he had, something within Clint snapped.

He became convinced that there were uncountable laws and procedures that were open for interpretation, persecution, and abuse. And then there are the laws that are just plain silly . . .

Clint began his career as Nuance after a day-long "crime" spree; he spent the day jaywalking back and forth across traffic, putting money into other people's parking meters before they expired, and writing checks out of one account just *before* depositing sufficient funds from another.

After his rampage, he wrote a letter to the newspaper, anonymously detailing what he had done, and announcing his intent to break more laws. He ended the letter with "Know that, from this day forward, petty laws shall fall victim to the machinations of . . . Nuance! [sic]" Clint had meant to choose "Nuisance" as his code name but accidentally omitted the "s." The Associated Press reported the story nationwide (it was a slow news day), but compounded Clint's typo with one of their own, deleting the "i." And thus Nuance was born.

After a string of unsurpassed victories (read: the police have had better things to do than trying to find him), Nuance took his goal *more* public by taking out a series of full-page ads in many newspapers, detailing his manifesto. Although it's against newspaper policy to publish inciting advertisements, many editors have taken both an interest and a sympathetic stance for Nuance and his ideals. (Publicly these editors state that they ran the ads in order to give the police and the public more clues to try and track him down.)

Goals

Nuance is arguably a bizarre kind of anarchist; he *does* believe there should be laws, but doesn't believe we need as many laws as exist. He understands that it's much easier to create a law than to uncreate one, and the legal system is filled with laws that either don't make sense or have yet to be struck down.

To that end, Nuance will continue breaking as many "silly" laws (as he perceives them) as possible, gloating and publicizing his actions every step of the way. How he does this depends largely on the campaign; in a Supers world he almost certainly would wear a costume. In more mundane worlds he would merely operate covertly (albeit on the flamboyant side of what would be acceptable). Nuance still maintains a "secret" identity, although (due to a lack of time) Clint's legal practice isn't as bustling as it was in his prime. Fortunately he still makes more than enough money to fund his illegal activities. Nuance generally employs the homeless or passersby on the street to take pictures or otherwise record his actions. If he is not a costumed crusader, he will doctor such evidence (by blurring out his face or other identifying features) before sending copies to the police and press.

Nuance also has an accomplice: Senator Fine. She finds herself alternately agreeing with his goals and wanting him to get help; regardless, she does what she can to keep him out of trouble, through secret contacts and other favors.

Campaign Use

- Nuance probably works best as an "alternate" threat for overworked hero groups. "We have a reliable rumor that someone is attempting to blow up Niagara Falls. Oh, and we have another report of someone who's using the mail system to send single bottles of alcohol to a state that doesn't allow such shipments." As a long-running comedic element, Nuance can be a recurring "mastermind" that's constantly hovering around the edges. In this case, ideally the campaign is busy enough that the heroes don't have time to devote to tracking him down.
- For darker campaigns, Nuance could be a symbol of what the heroes are willing to tolerate, as he descends deeper into (relative) depravity and justification. They may be able to justify his actions when he mails them a mix CD of copyrighted songs dedicated to them, but might have a harder time when he breaks into the city's aquifer and adds safe levels of fluoride to the unfluorinated water supply. What if he hacks into a television network's satellite feed and alters the broadcast to show programs without commercials? And at the extreme, how will they respond when they learn Nuance murdered someone who was attempting to commit suicide?
- Of course, the heroes could also need legal aid at some point, and enlist the services of one Clint Davin before becoming entangled in his problems . . .
- Finally, for lighter campaigns where heroes don't want to lock up Nuance, they might be able to uncover his secrets and try to help him. Senator Fine, in particular, may well find herself falling in love with Clint; a relationship might enable them to forget their respective heartaches and resume a "normal" life.

The Static Curtain

*Peter "Paws" Sheppard hadn't bathed in four days. Although not uncommon by itself, it was especially common in the week before the new issue of **Real Truth Now** went to press. The copy shop needed to get it by 5 PM, or else it wouldn't be printed in time to mail to the 87 subscribers. "The truth needed to be timely," Paws always said.*

Unfortunately, he needed one more story . . . preferably for the front side of the newsletter. Paws sighed, put his cup of cold coffee in the microwave, and unfocussed his eyes onto the clippings on the table.

And then he saw a pattern.

One face, appearing on the sidelines of seemingly random events:

- *The controversial 1972 Olympic basketball upset of the Soviets over the United States team. Standing on the sidelines with a Polaroid camera.*
- *The 1974 closing of the largest remaining door-to-door milk delivery service in the Northeast. A powerful mayor in the foreground; him in the background.*
- *A 1979 press conference with Jim Jones aide Michael Prokes, minutes before he "committed suicide" in a restroom. In the audience with a notepad and a manila envelope.*

The acrid smell of burning coffee filled the air; the microwave did its job too well. Paws moved to recover his mug just as there was a knock at the door.

The peephole revealed it was a person dressed as a milkman; he reached for something, and then the view went black.

The Static Curtain began as the mastermind of Dr. David Bakker in 1967. Prior to that time he had been one of the foremost conspiracy theorists on the Kennedy assassination in his day, with reams of information in loose-leaf binders strewn around his one-room basement apartment in Detroit. Then, on his thirtieth birthday -- as he had conclusively proven in his mind that the hit-and-run death of ex-Jack Ruby employee Rose Cherie was, in fact, an accident -- David came to some "realizations":

- Given enough random facts, it should be possible to tie any random occurrence into a greater conspiracy.
- The weirder the occurrence, the easier it generally is to tie to something else.
- As such, any event *specifically* fabricated to be unusual should be able to tie into a conspiracy (and possibly The Conspiracy, if such a thing exists).
- If David were to create such an event, he may well become embroiled into The Conspiracy himself, enabling him to get more information than he had access to as an outsider.
- It may also enable him to access illicit money, letting him move out of his efficiency apartment and possibly meet women.

Unfortunately, 1968 was rife with tragedies, giving Bakker ample opportunity to put his theory to work. A "witness" paid to tell a confusing story, the destruction of some tangential evidence remotely tied to a principle investigation, a date-modified receipt moved from one business to another . . . the plan was in motion. Christmas Eve of the same year found a fat un-postmarked envelope stuffed with a hundred \$100 bills in his (aliased) post office box. He had no idea where it came from, nor why. But obviously he was now part of The Conspiracy.

And thus the Static Curtain was born.

The Static Curtain (taking its name from random noise often used to muffle actual noise, and the "curtain" Bakker so wished to see behind) had two goals:

- Fund (seemingly) insane and illogical projects, none of them having anything to do with any other. The projects are designed to spread incorrect information, suppress real events and information, and otherwise obfuscate the truth.
- Accumulate data based on the effects those projects produce, and use it to discern more information about The Conspiracy.

(Note that Bakker does *not* use this data to modify the random conspiracy-threads he weaves; for the Static Curtain to be successful, he reasons, it mustn't deviate from its goal of using chaos to find order.)

What projects the Static Curtain undertakes depend entirely on the "tone" of the campaign . . . or at least the tone the GM wishes the Curtain to have. It can range from silly to strange to downright lethal (or some combination thereof).

Some examples of projects the Static Curtain may undertake (or have undertaken):

Light Activities

- Completely suppressing the Beatles' song "Left Is Right (And Right Is Wrong)" amid misinformation and three hoax songs "Colliding Circles," "Deck Chair," and "Pink Litmus Paper Shirt."
- Creating records of a rash of Jim Morrison sightings in Paris two years after his death in 1971.

Weird Activities

- Establishing secret pirate radio stations in the 9,000-12,000 KHz range, where people recite random groups of five-digit numbers in various languages.
- Taking steps to delay the transformation of the Spruce Goose airplane into a tourist attraction, pushing back the original date from 1974 to 1977.

Dark Activities

- Assassinate everyone with the name "Dan Smith" who was born in Boston in 1978.
- Destroy the lives of conspiracy theorists with an expertise in Watergate.

Goals

Bakker has always held (privately) that the purpose of the Curtain is to learn about -- and ultimately uncover -- The Conspiracy; he justifies the techniques he employs (no matter how bizarre or cruel they may be) by pointing to the results. He claims to be closer to uncovering the truth now than he ever has been.

A couple of his closest confidants don't buy this story fully; although they don't know the depth of Bakker's data, after more than 30 years of accumulating information from the inside they feel he should have enough to uncover The Conspiracy by now. The fact that he hasn't concerns them.

Their fears take two forms. First, they worry that the Static Curtain may be *too* successful; what if, by trying to uncover the Conspiracy, they've actually become an integral part of it . . . or become the *entire* thing? Or, perhaps worse, what if Bakker has lied (or been delusional) about what he's learned? What if he doesn't know anything at all? "Though this be madness, there is madness to it . . ."

Campaign Use

- In a campaign with secrets, weirdness, and intrigue, the Static Curtain is perhaps best used as an "alternative" conspiracy, providing misinformation, alternative threads, or comic relief to any investigators. If there are any great odd tidbits you were never able to work into the larger tapestry, why not attribute them to the Static

Curtain?

- The Static Curtain can also be an invaluable source of information for those looking for insights into The Truth . . . although it is unlikely such aid will come free. The Curtain has little need for money (Bakker only ever spent \$3,200 of the original \$10,000, and has kept the rest . . . with its envelope), earning enough from its random ties to The Conspiracy to keep it more than comfortable. Payment for information, then, is likely to take the form favors: "Of course we can tell you what the government actually did on the moon in 1969. But first, we have heard rumors that someone has unearthed a cache of Kenner's unreleased missile-firing Boba Fetts from their 1979 mail-in promotion . . ."
- The Static Curtain can also make a unique antagonist; if an investigator happens to be (say) a Dan Smith born in Boston in 1977, he may find people wanting to kill him for no reason! Given how persistent the organization can be in pursuing its random goals, thwarting them as an enemy may be difficult. GMs may want to complicate this idea even further; what if the thread that caused the Curtain to take interest in the heroes also catches the eye of The Conspiracy? The party may find themselves in a dangerous three-way, close to the truth but threatening to be destroyed for it!
- Used sparingly, the Curtain is also a good GM tool for any plot holes that (invariably) creep into any complicated campaign. Why didn't the newspaper respond to the audio tape proof that had been mailed to it? Wasn't the person interviewed in Dallas supposed to be serving a life sentence in Chicago? Why did the government contact have the name "Mike Sanford" one adventure, and "Mike Simpson" in another? Well, obviously the Static Curtain has been active . . .

License to Drive

by Steven Marsh

From the Written Exam

Question 22: Presuming you had no choice but to hit one of the following, which would you choose?

- The scaffolding where painters are finishing an office building
- The baby carriage, presuming there is a 50% of it containing a baby, and 50% chance of it containing cans
- The fruit cart
- It depends on whether I am chasing or being chased

Question 23: It is acceptable to drive down an alleyway to lose pursuers in which of the following instances?

- Any time you are being pursued by more than one vehicle.
- Any time you are being pursued by more than one vehicle, where at least one vehicle is a law enforcement vehicle, AND one vehicle is not a law enforcement vehicle.
- Any time you are reasonably certain the chasing vehicle is wider than yours.
- Alleyways are appropriate to drive down at any time you are being chased.

Question 24: Which of the following methods is considered acceptable for shooting a firearm from a moving vehicle?

- "Noon and Left": Right hand holding the steering wheel at the 12 o'clock position, left hand firing the weapon out the window.
- "Eight and Two": Right hand holding the steering wheel at the 2 o'clock position, left knee stabilizing the wheel at the 8 o'clock position, left hand firing the weapon out the window.
- "Eleven and One": Right hand holding the steering wheel at the 1 o'clock position, left hand cradling the steering wheel at 11 o'clock while shooting the firearm straight ahead. This requires the front windshield to have been shot out from either the outside or inside.
- It is never considered acceptable to shoot a firearm from a moving vehicle.

In many stories, action heroes often drive in what would be described as an exceedingly reckless manner while in the pursuit of their goals. And yet they are almost never targeted by law enforcement, and the last scene before the fade-to-black is generally *not* the hero being carted away in shackles.

Why is this? Well, it may be because they have a License to Drive.

Unlike its more famous cousin, a License to Kill, a License to Drive is a legally binding arrangement that allows the wielder to drive using any means necessary, while performing duties under the service of the issuing agency. Should the holder of a License to Drive be challenged by any law enforcement authority, all he needs to do is flash the special

License; by arrangement, he must then be *immediately* allowed to continue his duties. Failure to do such will ensure that the arresting officer has a miserable life ahead of him catching rabid dogs (or some equally unpleasant public service).

The License

The License itself is constructed to be bleeding edge technology for the time it's made in; thirty years ago it would be made of titanium and/or Flexon, today it would be made of an indestructible plastic with an embedded microchip, and thirty years from now it may consist of a thin computer capable of testing the holder's DNA on the spot. Regardless, utmost efforts have been made to ensure the item is not transferrable or forgeable, and almost as much effort has been spent to make it indestructible. (After all, if some fool driver is burnt to a crisp because of a car crash, the Powers That Be would like to know who he was, so they know precisely who they are disavowing all knowledge of.)

Due to the expensive and unforgeable methods of creating the License, it only need be flashed briefly to law enforcement authorities to cause them to back off; generally the holders of the License to Drive are good enough drivers that they can convey this without even slowing down. (In sufficiently high-tech games, the driver may not even need to visibly show the License; upon activation, it may emit a beacon informing the police that he is invoking his duties *and* responsibilities.) In addition, the holder of the License has, in essence, a Legal Immunity while invoking its powers; broken laws, property damage, stealing a car to chase a bad guy, firing a weapon, even vehicular manslaughter will not have any repercussions from the law. (The issuing agency, on the other hand, will demand an explanation . . .)

Regardless, in all settings the License to Drive *does* require conscious activation. If driving recklessly, the driver can expect to be harassed by police, chased by mounties, and otherwise harassed until he can dig the License out of his wallet (or wherever it's kept). This becomes important because the issuing agency *demand*s that the License be kept safe (it can't just be taped to the front window); if the License is lost or otherwise falls into undesirable hands, it might possibly be compromised, which would render the advantages of the License moot. Note that the License can be activated after the fact; if the police catch up with and stop the driver, he can flash the License and be on his way.

Bestowing the License is not done automatically, nor is it something the issuing agency takes lightly. It will generally only be given to its best drivers, or those who will require its powers. Those wishing to receive a License will need to pass rigorous tests of all sorts . . . written, driving, psychological, and the like. The agency is also not shy about revoking the License if they feel the driver has lost the privilege; if the driver is shown to be needlessly *and* recklessly using its powers, or commits a heinous act or lapse of judgement (say, smashing into a shopping mall at Christmas time because the driver thought he saw someone who looked like the witness he was after), he will probably find himself limited to a more "mundane" driver's license . . . at best.

Having said that, the agency doesn't really care what the driver does with the License's powers provided he doesn't cause any problems; among other things, this generally means that many License-holders aren't shy about invoking their rights to drive at insane speeds down the highway. But if they hit another car or otherwise cause damage, they're probably in deep trouble with the agency.

The Police

The GM should decide in advance what arrangements have been made with the police. The default is "non-interference"; if the driver invokes the License to Drive, then all police will avoid the driver *and* whatever the target of his mad driving is (whether pursuer or pursued). If the License-holder decides he wants the police's help, he will need to use whatever means would be necessary for anyone else (calling the police department, flagging an authority down, etc.).

But the default state could just as easily be something like "obstruct the other car(s) involved in my pursuit." (Creative GMs could easily concoct situations where this would be undesirable . . .) The general rule should be that, no matter what the default response, it will not be useful in all circumstances. Such are the costs of being a hero. (If the player

does want more "intuitive" or helpful police, he should buy them as an Ally group or the like.)

Costs

In *GURPS*, the License to Drive is a 5-point advantage; the legal right of being able to drive without regard to the law is tempered by the fact that they follow another code while invoking those rights (generally "get the bad guy"). Should the GM be insane enough to allow the driver to have a License to Drive *without* a clear mandate (in other words, "Drive however you like, whenever you like,") then this is a 10-point advantage . . . although the GM should come up with some circumstances under which the License can be revoked (not unlike the Legal Immunity advantage), and realize in advance that this advantage is likely to make "adversary" synonymous with "speed bump."

In *In Nomine* the License to Drive is, in fact, a celestial artifact; it has the special power that anything done while its power is invoked will not disturb the Symphony! (Ofanim *love* their Licenses . . .) Needless to say, both sides of the War take this power very seriously, and neither will give their agents a License without darn good reasons. The License costs 20 points, plus 1 per level. (In *GURPS In Nomine* this License costs 35 points +1 per level.) If an *In Nomine* driver wants both the special non-disturbance powers of the License *and* the police non-interference powers, then the base cost rises to 25 points (40 in *GURPS*).

Campaign Uses

- The License to Drive is, needless to say, about as cinematic as you can get. It's designed specifically so games can have those rollicking action-movie car chases we know and love, without fear of police involvement.
- If the heroes have secret (or otherwise non-public) identities, they may well face situations where they need to decide whether or not to invoke the License's powers -- thus risking their identities -- or let the bad guys get away. Neither one is going to be looked upon very well by the issuing agency.
- In a complicated world (like *In Nomine*) there may well be two (or more!) agencies that can issue such Licenses; to really startle players, consider the possibilities if only the *adversaries* have the License to Drive. (In a conspiracy game, it may well be disconcerting to have the police who are helping you chase the Stogie-Chomping Man suddenly break off the pursuit . . . shortly before he turns around and starts barreling towards the heroes' car at lethal speed . . .)
- And then there's always Sheriff Jasper Culligan, who don't care none about no special rights th' heroes have; he's gonna bring them law-breakers in by any means necessary . . .

* * *

(Special thanks to Sean Punch and Elizabeth McCoy for their number-crunching help.)



Reviews of Gamable Fiction

Hail, Fredonia!

Duck Soup and The Mouse That Roared

Review by Matt Riggsby

Most acknowledged source material for roleplaying adventures comes from serious sources: SF and fantasy epics, action-adventure movies, horror and espionage novels, and the like. However, as products like *Toon* and *GURPS Discworld* demonstrate, it's possible to draw roleplaying inspiration from funny sources as well. This article presents a pair of pocket-sized nations from two classic comedy films which could be used as the basis for roleplaying adventures: Freedonia and the Duchy of Grand Fenwick.

Freedonia

"Well, that covers a lot of ground. Say, you cover a lot of ground yourself. You better beat it; I hear they're going to tear you down and put up an office building where you're standing. You can leave in a taxi. If you can't get a taxi, you can leave in a huff. If that's too soon, you can leave in a minute and a huff. You know, you haven't stopped talking since I came here? You must have been vaccinated with a phonograph needle."

--Prime Minister Firefly to Freedonia's chief financial backer

Freedonia is the setting of *Duck Soup*, #5 on the American Film Institute's list of the best 100 American film comedies and considered by some to be the Marx Brothers' finest film (although the author prefers *A Night At The Opera*). Freedonia is a pocket-sized republic somewhere in Europe. It appears to be as quaint as any tiny nation, populated by stolid peasants and cosmopolitan aristocrats. Unfortunately, Freedonia is also in constantly dire financial straits. Its government is propped up only by the loans of Mrs. Teasdale, the widow of an American tycoon. After years of assistance, her continued support comes at an unusual price: the Freedonians must make an American lawyer, one Rufus T. Firefly, the prime minister. Presumably, Mrs. Teasdale knows Firefly only by third-party recommendations, since Firefly is . . . well, Groucho Marx. He is, by turns, insulting, charming, arrogant, insulting, conniving, generous, wheedling, insulting, lecherous, greedy, and insulting yet again, sometimes in the course of a single sentence. Firefly quickly baffles and offends everyone he meets while attempting to seduce every woman in sight.

Firefly's administration is beset not only by financial problems at home, but by threat of war from abroad. Freedonia's neighbor and long-time rival, Sylvania, is looking for any pretext to attack. The Sylvanian ambassador, Trentino, sends two spies to infiltrate Firefly's government: Pinky, a mute, and Chicolini, an idiot. The spies are played by Harpo and Chico Marx, respectively, so it's sometimes hard to tell whose interests they're pursuing; of course, the same could be said for Firefly, who dismisses his cabinet (the Chamber of Deputies) and replaces them with Pinky and Chicolini. Eventually, Chicolini is apprehended and put on trial for giving plans of Freedonia's defenses to Sylvania, but Firefly

turns the trial into a farce. Meanwhile, his constant insults to Trentino become a provocation for war, and the ambassador himself leads the Sylvania forces in their attack. However, Firefly (now assisted by Chicolini and Pinky) secures victory by infiltrating the Sylvania lines and capturing Trentino himself.

Grand Fenwick

"Je ne sais pas. Je ne parle pas français."

--Tully Bascombe, gamekeeper, on being questioned about a conversation with French customs official

While *Duck Soup* is a Depression-era anti-war film, *The Mouse That Roared* is a Cold War fable. The book and the movie based on it (in which Peter Sellers famously plays three leading characters) are set in the Duchy of Grand Fenwick, a forgotten pocket between France and Switzerland. Fenwick's sole export is an exceptional wine, Pinot Grand Fenwick. However, when an American vintner begins marketing an inferior but heavily advertised imitation, Fenwick's economy appears doomed. Fenwick's solution at least has the advantage of novelty: declare war on the United States. In the early years of the Cold War, this wasn't -- quite -- as absurd as it sounds. In the wake of WWII, programs like the Marshall plan poured millions of dollars into rebuilding Europe. The Fenwickian parliament reasons that if they were to lose a war with the US, the victorious Americans would do the same for them, reviving the Fenwickian economy.

The plan hits a snag when it develops that the US government doesn't believe that Fenwick exists. Their declaration of war is filed away by a State Department clerk who, unable to find Fenwick on the map, believes it a hoax. Fenwick has no choice but to take the lack of fight to the Americans. The Fenwickian army, if that's the right word, consists of a dozen men who occasionally drill with longbows and is led by Tully Bascombe, the ducal gamekeeper and a shy, amiable man with no military inclinations or abilities to speak of. Nevertheless, they pack up their bows and chainmail, board a bus for Calais, and hire a small freighter to take them to America.

They arrive in New York during a nuclear air raid drill and wander the deserted streets searching for somebody to surrender to, unaware that the population of the city is hiding in the subways. Eventually, they stumble over the laboratory of a Dr. Kokinitz, an eccentric researcher who refused to enter the shelters in order to perfect a football-sized doomsday device, the Q-bomb. Tully seizes the professor, his daughter, and the dangerously unstable Q-bomb and returns to Fenwick, suddenly giving his country the lead in the global arms race. In order to keep the world safe from the Q-bomb, the US has little choice but to surrender and, as the surrender's only provision, push the cheap knock-off wine off the market to restore Fenwick's economy.

Campaigns

While the idea of a silly little kingdom could be transplanted to a wide variety of genres (obscure fantasy kingdoms, out-of-the-way planets in a SF campaign), these quaint European countries seem best suited for use in a steampunk campaign. A product of the early 1930's, much of *Duck Soup* can be transplanted to the late nineteenth century with little modification. The few bits of very late or post-Victorian technology which appear in the film, such as telephones, the primer minister's car (an unusual motorcycle and semi-detached sidecar), and a radio, can be glossed over or replaced with steampunk-flavored analogues, such as personal telegraphs, a steam-powered motorcycle, and a very loud Victrola. Little is said about exactly where Freedonia and Sylvania are, so the GM can fit them into any blank spaces on the map. However, they might be better wedged in between Switzerland, Austria, Italy, and Germany. Freedonia has a vaguely Germanic or at least Alpine look, while Sylvania appears to have Italian influences (for example, Italianate names and Chicolini's atrocious accent; Pinky might be called Rosetto instead). Firefly would be a distant ally of the Emperor Norton in *Deadlands* or a thorn in Bismarck's side in *Castle Falkenstein* (although in Firefly's world, Bismarck might be replaced by Charlie Chaplin's Adenoid Hinkel from *The Great Dictator*). Arguably, the surreal comedy of the Marx brothers could be run as a "realistic" *Toon* game.

Fenwick's Medieval feel would be as backwards in the steam age as in the atomic age. Working out the Cold War elements is a bit more difficult, but hardly insurmountable. Great Britain or a German empire could stand in easily for the US, and would be much easier to reach. The Fenwickians could simply become lost rather than wander through a

mysteriously deserted metropolis and stumble over Professor Kokinitz's home in the countryside. Rather than Marshall plan-like assistance, Fenwick may simply have hoped for a foreign garrison, to which they could have sold all manner of supplies. In the book, Gloriana is a young and extremely attractive young woman, perhaps fair game for a marriage alliance. In the movie, Gloriana is an elderly widow, played very much in a Queen Victoria mode by Peter Sellers. Indeed, in a steampunk campaign, Gloriana might carry on a cordial correspondence with Victoria herself.

Adventures (or, "Funny, She Doesn't Look Fenwickian")

If PCs are unraveling your plots too quickly, Freedonia may be a good place to send them. It might constitute a sort of diplomatic Russian Front, where all sides can invest massive resources with little or no apparent effect. Freedonia must be something of a wild card in world affairs because of the unpredictable prime minister. Firefly may appear insane, but with his victory over the Sylvanians, he has decimated his enemy's military while partially modernizing his own with captured weapons, giving other potential invaders pause. The wisest analysts will be unable to make head or tail of his policies, and the Freedonian bureaucracy is likely to be running scared as a series of contradictory and incomprehensible memos cross their desks. Was Firefly just lucky when he defeated Sylvania, or did he have a plan? Is he loyal to Freedonia, or is he working for another cause? Does he really make Ludwig II look mildly eccentric by comparison, or is he just mental health's answer to Typhoid Mary? Is he, as some have suspected, a distant relative of a certain German socialist? Freedonia is a good setting for a parody of conventional espionage adventures (imagine Groucho in place of Dr. Doom or Goldfinger and Harpo and Chico in the place of a James Bond villain's sidekick).

The GM might be careful, though, about just how much the core characters from the film are used. All the usual cautions about using a character from literature in a game apply here, and then some. With the wealth of pseudo-Marxist comedy that has come from Groucho's influence on the American comic tradition, Firefly can be great fun for a prepared GM, but it may be best if he is used sparingly. Simply put, doing Groucho is hard work for the performer and can be hard on the audience. Although his look and sound are easily imitated, his fast-talking style of comedy was designed specifically to irritate and silence his straight men. Overexposure and forced inactivity will frustrate players, which defeats the purpose of a comic adventure. Instead, Firefly should probably be a shadowy figure on the fringes, occasionally blowing into the scene to stir up chaos and leaving quickly before anybody has a chance to react. Chico and Harpo, on the other hand, make delightfully inept contacts or assistants.

Fenwick is also well-suited for espionage adventures, although the setting is somewhat more genteel than anarchic Firefly-era Freedonia. Pre-war Fenwick was notably isolated, but adventures abound during and after the war with America. During the war, PCs could be diplomats sent to negotiate peace with Fenwick (or diplomats sent by third parties for an alliance with Fenwick, as all the major powers did in the book and movie), American/British officials chasing reports of mail-clad men in the countryside (in the film, the shining mail was mistaken for spacesuits and the Fenwickians for alien invaders), or even mercenaries sent in lieu of actual Fenwickians with confusing orders to invade the enemy and surrender as quickly as possible. Fenwick could even appear in a *GURPS Discworld* adventure, with a pint-sized army or barbarian horde pathetically trailing along behind the PCs through the streets of Ankh-Moorpork, constantly trying to surrender to them.

Post-war Fenwick becomes a bit more serious. Because the Q-bomb, or whatever stands in for it, is dangerously unstable and Fenwick itself appears disinclined to participate in international affairs, sensible nations will leave well enough alone. Alas, sensible nations are in perilously short supply. Fenwick may become the target of subtle espionage, with every major player on the world stage sending agents to try to unravel the secret of the mysterious artifact, gain Fenwick's friendship, and, if possible, acquire it for their own country. If the GM feels compelled to insert more Illuminated elements into the adventure, it's worth pointing out that Leo McKern, who played the leader of the parliamentary opposition in the movie, also played #2 in *The Prisoner* twice.

One motif that appears in both films is characters who resemble one another very closely. In *Duck Soup*, Chicolini and Pinky demonstrate that just about anybody can paint on eyebrows and a moustache and pass for the prime minister. In *The Mouse That Roared*, the roles of Tully, Count Mountjoy (the Fenwickian Prime Minister, whom Gloriana affectionately calls "Bobo"), and Gloriana were all played by Peter Sellers, with the quiet mention that the original Fenwick was the father of his country in every possible way. Similar appearances can be a problem in any isolated

location, where people start to look like one another anyway, but it can be compounded with historical quirks such as Fenwick's. Any adventure in Fenwick or Freedonia can take advantage of mistaken identities.

Suggested Reading and Viewing

Movies

- *Duck Soup*
- *Horsefeathers* -- An early Marx Brothers movie featuring Groucho as an authority figure, this time a university dean.
- *Coconuts*
- *Animal Crackers*
- *A Night At The Opera*
- *A Day At The Races*
- *The Mouse That Roared* -- The movie adaptation is a broader comedy than the book, altering some characterizations for Seller's legendary triple role.
- *The Mouse On The Moon* -- Peter Sellers returns for the so-so sequel, playing only one role.

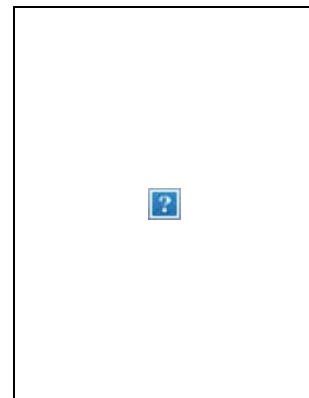
Books and Graphic Novels

- Wibberley, Leonard; *The Mouse That Roared*
- Wibberley; *The Mouse On The Moon*. In this sequel, Fenwick joins the space race.
- Wibberley; *The Mouse on Wall Street*
- Wibberley; *The Mouse That Saved The West*
- Sim, Dave; *Cerebus*. One of the recurring characters in this long-running comic book series is Lord Julius, a more consciously cunning Groucho Marx clone. GMs might be able to lift his scenes wholesale to represent Firefly's administrative style.

Radio and TV

- *You Bet Your Life* -- The original Groucho radio and TV show, not the later revival with Bill Cosby. This game show was essentially an excuse to let Groucho talk for a half-hour.
- *Animaniacs* -- Yakko's comedic style is notably Marxist. Particularly useful is the Anvilania episode, a clear homage to *Duck Soup*.
- *The Goon Show* -- This anarchic 1950's BBC radio show starring Peter Sellers is probably too surreal to adapt directly to adventures, but its characters would be very much at home in a comedic steampunk campaign, and some of the devices which appear from time to time as throw-away gags (horse-drawn zeppelins, ancient monumental Christmas puddings turned rabid man-eater, steam-powered leather microphones) might be built by mad scientists.

Pyramid Review from Dimension X!



Decados Fiefs (for the Fading Suns RPG)

Published by [Holistic Design Inc.](#)

Written by Gabriel Zarate

Cover and Interior Art by John Bridges

32 pages (plus inside covers); \$7.95

Fething, lad -- mind if I call you Feth? Yes? Fething it is . . . er, Sir Fething, of course -- you want an entertaining play about the Decados, you came to the right place. The Masque guild is *more* than willing to help you out. We'll write it, we'll act it, we'll find the folks who'll do the magic lantern shows. No trouble!

Now, there's just the *slightest* problem . . . almost not worth mentioning, really.

Which? Ah. Well, as you'll recall, you wanted your epic to span all the Decados worlds, right? Right. Well, we've done some preliminary research, and let me say this has proven no easy task.

We'd *thought* we found the perfect tome for the subject. See, we have a few . . . friends in the Imperial palace, if you know of what I speak, and have as such gained access to a tome entitled *Decados Fiefs* provided by a Sir Klimenty Decados to Emperor Alexius Hawkwood himself, and the fifth in the *Imperial Survey* series of books intended to broaden the knowledge and scope of the Empire.

Sir Klimenty, of course, is one of the few nobles of House Decados -- a noble house with a reputation, I'm sure I need not say, for depravity as well as wit and charm -- to join the Emperor's Questing Knights. So I was expecting a certain amount of intrigue and obfuscation with this report. But perhaps above all, I was expecting it to be *interesting* . . . say what you will of the Decados, their ability to hold captive an audience with their actions and words is legendary. Besides, what's the point of stealing a copy of something meant for the Emperor's eyes only if it's boring?

Sadly, this has not been the case.

It would seem Sir Klimenty has been instructed or trained by his house in the art of being direct; he is, perhaps to put it bluntly, dull. He has no shortage of details -- historical, geographical, and political -- on the four worlds he covers, but he lacks the passion and wit that I, frankly, have come to associate with the Decados.

Compare this tome with the previous volume, Sir Piao Lui's *Li Halan Fiefs*. (How did I acquire another volume intended solely for the Emperor? A fine question, and one I shall surely answer later . . .) In that work we gain insight not only into the worlds explored by Sir Piao Lui, but also into his house, his church, and his own opinions and thoughts.

Such was not the case with *Decados Fiefs*. Although an invaluable resource as a historical and geographical guide (which, I grant, is the intended purpose of these guides; perhaps the good Emperor dictated that subsequent volumes in the series contain less voice and more fact), it nonetheless failed to inspire me significantly in my quest to tell stories based on this region.

Certainly, even amid the details there are wonderful bits of trivia -- like the constantly (and mysteriously) empty Acorbite steerage cars on the overrail system on Severus, or the custom of feeding strangers in the Ukiuq region of Malignatius lest they die of hunger and feed the demon patrons of Theodora Li Halan -- but I found myself wanting more. Where are the hooks I can wrap a story around? Where is the unique flavor of the Decados worlds? Perhaps this volume is ultimately intended for a wider audience, and as such cannot divulge greater secrets of its subjects; the glimpses I caught (like Cadiz' moon Persus, with mysterious evidence of a previous sentient landing as well as a network of tunnels beneath the surface) merely left me hungry for more.

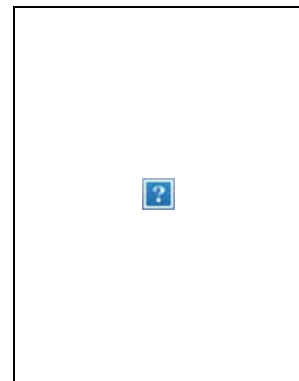
Indeed, at times I found myself wondering even *where* all the Decados were; I say only in half-jest that Malignatius doesn't seem to be ruled by *any* Decados, and certainly widespread evidence of the ruthlessness and iron rule of that house was lacking. While this would ordinarily be evidence of an unreliable narrator, I didn't even get the sense that he was covering anything up . . . again, obscuring the truth through tedium, perhaps? We get some glimpses of what I'd always thought of as the Decados' true nature -- the depravity of Duke Stephan Svanfeld of Cadiz is well-detailed, for example -- but precious little beyond that.

It is not until the last page of this report that I get a sense of the "real" author struggling to get out. There, in his brief half-page descriptions of Manitou and Pandemonium/Iver, do we learn some more insight not just into the history, wants, and desires of the speaker, but also his Decados heritage. For example, one passage of his Iver description begins, "After rudely boarding and searching my vessel, these fanatics took offense to the presence of certain Decados cultural items intended for my personal use . . ." Had the rest of the book been more in this vein, I would almost certainly have more ideas both into the nature and character of these worlds, and could craft you a story fit for a noble, Feth. Fething, sorry.

But all is not lost; I have an alternate scheme. I currently have plans for dinner next week with the Duchess Salandra Decados; she is considered by many to be perhaps the quintessential Decados. Hopefully I shall be able to trick some insight and story ideas out of her.

Fething Hawkwood, I assure you: When completed, this play shall secure your place in your house!

--*Consul Andrew J. Despitt of the Masque Guild (last known conversation)*
Transcribed by Fellow Steven Marsh



The Contract Directory (for SLA Industries)

From Nightfall Games Ltd.

Released by [Hogshead Publishing](#)

Edited by Tim Dedopulos

Written by Dave Allsop, Max Bantleman, Chris Cotgrove, Glenn Barry, Tim Dedopulos, John Dodd, Derek Dow, Jared Earle, James Fullerton, Ed Handley, James Lennon, Canis Lupus, Roy, McDonald, Adam Page, Leath Sheales, Morton Smith, Mark Whittington, Liam Wickham, John Wilson, Sue Wilson, Rob Wood

Exterior Illustration by John Beeston

Interior Illustrations by Dave Allsop, Stuart Beel, Derek Dow, Brian Dugan, Jon Hodgson, Clint Langley, Steve Luke, Dom Reardon, Pol Sigerson, Jock Simpson, Mark Tedin, Damon Wilson-Hart

160 pages; \$22.95

Eddy Goya: Hello again fight fans, I'm Eddy Goya, here with Baz Danziger, taking the time out between all of the blood, gore, action, drama and excitement that I know *you* demand to tell you about the latest data slug you will want throughout this season of the Contract Circuit. Yes, that's right, as I speak, the 904 SD issue of *The Contract Directory* is available at your nearest *SLA Industries* approved data slug outlet. This guide to the exotic media superstars *you* adore as Contract Killers is the perfect companion to have by your side when you join me, Eddy Goya and the team, everyday for the news and duels that make up the Contract Circuit.

Baz Danziger: And remember folks, if you want to join the circuit yourselves, you need to be a SLA employee and have a "Psychological Examination and Evaluation Exemption Certificate" from the Department of Psychology and Psychosis. Any stressed out, whacked out citizen of the World of Progress can become a killer, but without that certificate you just aren't *mad* enough to fight in the spotlight that is the Contract Circuit.

And if you at home want to check yourself out to see if you're mad enough for the circuit, then you can find a complete guide to testing your stress levels in the back of your copy of *The Contract Directory!*

Eddy Goya: That's right, Baz. With that certificate in their hands, a Contract Killer is no longer just an Operative for SLA Industries -- though many operatives do join the Circuit -- but an officially sanctioned killer, able to reap all of the benefits that fame, fortune and sponsorship from soft companies can bring as they climb the ladder that is the

Contract Circuit. With *The Contract Directory*, we take right into their world from the comfort of your couch. Any time *you* want.

Baz Danziger: *The Contract Directory* takes a look at all aspects of the circuit: the laws and regulations to every fight; the VideoDrones that can track and film every killer twenty-four seven outside of their homes and the White Van Man crews that boost and co-ordinate VideoDrone signals when a fight needs multiple camera angles; the agents that ensure that we get the contests you want, the Contract Hunters that bring all manner of dangerous creatures -- Manachines, giant insects and other monstrosities -- into the arena to clash with your favorite murderers in the arena; the referees, the medical teams and security that staff every arena. Your copy of *The Contract Directory* even includes a pin-up of perennial security superstars, Boskii and Fry!

Eddy Goya: It's not just our much-loved Stormer and Brain Waster duo that get their own picture in *The Contract Directory*. Key down to the Directory section on this data slug and you'll find profiles of forty of the circuit's top Contract Killers -- Topnotch, the bold and beautiful sniper extraordinaire; Quill, the cruel and sadistic, biogenetically enhanced Wraith Raider; Pig Man, the pigs-head helm-wearing enforcer for the Skin Trade, who always gives his defeated opponents to his sponsors; the hated Vevaphon known as Screech, 'cos that's all it ever utters; Fritz, the Tek Trex drone operated by the terrorist Puppeteer via satellite; the superbly skilled Johnny Automatic and of course, the media darling herself, Delia the Destroyer!

Baz Danziger: And talking of gorgeousness, you'll notice that the protective sleeve of your copy of *The Contract Directory* is graced by a stunning image of "Diana."

Eddy Goya: That's right, Baz. And *The Contract Directory* comes with an index of all the images in this year's edition.

Baz Danziger: Absolutely, Eddy. Pity that all those images aren't labeled for that easy to identify need, but I'm sure that'll be fixed in next year's edition.

Eddy Goya: Urm- Yes, Baz . . . Anyway, moving on fight fans, the 904 SD edition takes you to every type of fight and location that the circuit has to offer. The hand-to-hand brawls of the Kinetic Pit; the swinging and slicing of The Pendulum; twenty unarmed killers and a pile of blades between them in the dark, that is Fish in a Barrel and the fans favorite -- The Hunt, played across arenas that model sections of Downtown, the Jungle or even one of the Cannibal Sectors.

Baz Danziger: For our section on Tactical Considerations, we have the best writers and tacticians look at just how the Contract Killer looks at some of the fight locations we bring you everyday . . . Sewer Fighting, Wilderness areas off *and* on Mort, Wastelands, Suspension Platforms over the oceans of Mort, Cold Storage and Factory Zones, Research Stations, Lower Downtown and *even* in the outer fringes of Matliss 9, the Gas Giant, where the opponents don jet packs!

Eddy Goya: Let's not forget contests in zero-g there, Baz. But seriously, if you're a SLA Operative as well as a fight fan, then these comments will come in handy should you get assigned some of the more exotic BPNs . . .

Baz Danziger: Now that you mention exotic, Eddy, let's talk about the new gear that our Contract Killers are employing in the arena this year . . .

Eddy Goya: Thank you Baz. Every killer needs a signature weapon, and the latest range from the simple to *the* exotic! The simple includes the mighty hammer and mace, the axe and flail. The two-handed pick that will punch through an opponent's armor to the flesh beneath and the morning star that will swing round and bludgeon them! For those that want style, favorites we've seen this year include the whip, the bolas and the net.

Baz Danziger: Of course, whilst those weapons might be stylish, style isn't everything and some say they're not as effective as the new industrial weapons currently being employed by some Killers. Nail guns, power sanders, arc welders and even the concrete saw have all given us some great armor grinding action . . .

And another new weapon we've been seeing on the Hunt is the compound bow. But let's not forget that a weapon is just a weapon in the arena until a killer makes it their own . . . *The Contract Directory* takes you into some of the best workshops to examine how our killers get their arms and equipment modified and improved to make them not just more lethal, but also more eye-catchingly chic!

Eddy Goya: Another type of signature we see regularly in the arena is in hand-to-hand combat. All out brawls are always going to be crowd pleasers, but nothing gets the crowd on their feet and screaming is final blow, that coup de grace that brings an opponent down and out!

Baz Danziger: Even brawlers have their signature moves, but if you have award points for elegance, it would be for all those practitioners of the martial arts. Isn't that so, Eddy?

Eddy Goya: That's right Baz. And from the stylish to the strange, *The Contract Directory* throws a spotlight upon the latest addition to the line up of Contract Killers and that is the Advanced Carrien! Whatever their origins deep in the Cannibal Sectors and growing with their Carrien brethren, something sets them aside from their brutal upbringing.

Baz Danziger: Yes, and that something is their intelligence! Right, Eddy?

Eddy Goya: You're not wrong Baz! All an Advanced Carrien needs to do is to acquire their own "Psychological Examination and Evaluation Exemption Certificate" from the Department of Psychology and Psychosis, and then they too can join the circuit or even undergo SLA Operative training on Meny!

Baz Danziger: And finally Eddy- <BZZT BZZT>

Hiya everybody! Welcome to another broadcast from me, Lisa Fodens for Channel Resistance. We want you to watch our favorite, The Perfectionist in this afternoon's fight. He's sure to take down Mr. Slayer's sacrificial victim for today in the arena. But then there'll be another ready to take his place on the bread and circus that is the Contract Circuit -- designed and arranged to keep you distracted from the Truth . . .

And if you're a Contract Killer watching this -- and we do hope that you are -- ask yourself why you fight? Is it for the money? The fame? For the action figure and collectible cards of yourself that the kiddies love? Is it because your sponsor tells you to -- in addition to all that dirty work, they demand of you? If you do work it all out, let us know at Channel Resistance . . . This is Lisa Fodens signing off. <BZZT BZZT>

Off Screen:

-Dammit! Get that signal off the air! <BZZT> Finally. Eddy, you're back on . . .

Eddy Goya: And finally, Baz, you'll find some of the best Hunter Sheets in *The Contract Directory*. If you've the credits, you can sponsor one of these combined execution warrants and wanted posters to any of Mort's Hunter Cafes or even to magazines such as *Search and Destroy*. As you know, Baz, these are open to both Contract Killer and SLA Operative, so anyone wanting to fulfil these six, needs to move fast!

Baz Danziger: But for all you collectors out there, some of the very best new sheets will be made available in the forthcoming *Hunter Sheets* -- enough for every fan to own and savor!

Eddy Goya: Well, that's all we have time for today, as we have to return you to your scheduled series of clashes and fights this afternoon. But both Baz and I will be back with the Circuit Channel's regular post contest discussion and analysis after every fight!

We'll see then, but remember that *The Contract Directory*, the guide to the Contract Circuit in the World of Progress is available to you right now, from your nearest stockist, and published by Hogshead Publishing from a Nightfall Games design.

3ird Eye video recording of Contract Circuit Broadcast, 904 SD. Not available for re-

broadcast.

--Intercepted by Matthew Pook

April Fools Dungeon Tech

For *Toon* (Or Any Other Game You're Willing To Inflict These On)

by Doc Cross

Just like any other fantasy RPG, *Dungeons & TOONS* has its share of magical weapons, armor, and other items. Also, just like any other fantasy RPG, sometimes magical things are cursed to do strange things when used. We like to think of these funny and dangerous curses as the ultimate fantasy RPG April Fools joke. The hapless characters and their players may think differently about them, especially once they've Fallen Down a few times. Here is a selection of goofy cursed items to toss into your next *Dungeons & TOONS* game.

Sword of No Hitting

When used for any purpose other than combat, this seems to be a perfectly good (and very cool-looking) broadsword. However, when the time to fight rolls around, that all changes. The sword just will not hit anyone on a roll of less than 12 (and that's a *natural* 12, you sly rules lawyers) or 2 (ditto). The blade will get soft and spongy or all limp like a cooked noodle or it might even disappear . . . but it won't hit. Worse yet, you cannot drop it during combat. You can hold it in one hand (or foot, pseudopod, or whatever) while you use another weapon, but you can't let go of it until combat is over. Assuming, of course, that by then you aren't so badly beaten to a pulp that you can't move.

Bow of the Cosmic Shift

It looks like a normal bow . . . it feels like a normal bow . . . it even *smells* like a normal bow . . . heck, it might even taste like a normal bow, if you are strange enough to taste it. Not surprisingly then, most of the time, it works just like a normal bow. But not *all* of the time. You see, whenever the Animator feels like being evil (and Animators often feel like being evil) the bow activates a Cosmic Shift and something screwy and potentially painful happens. The bow might fly off while the arrow stays behind, or you might get shot from the bow by a suddenly anthropomorphic arrow, or the bow might just explode. Whatever happens, it will be completely unexpected and will Boggle everyone who sees it.

Ultramagnetic Armor

This fine suit of plate mail will just up and get highly magnetized on a Fight roll of 5 or less. It will stay magnetized for 1d turns, during which it will attract other suits of metal armor and anything else made of steel or iron (like big nasty sharp weapons and angry iron golems). Damage will vary, but should be at least 1d points of Magnet For Disaster Damage per item that hits you. There may be even more damage done to you by the cranky folks *wearing* the armor that hits you. And don't even ask about the ticked off iron golems.

Boots of Invisibility and Drunkenness

Oh yes, these are some bad boots, my friends. Sure, they *do* make you invisible while wearing them . . . but they also make you falling down drunk! One turn after you put them on, you'll find you have a -5 to all Zip rolls, a -5 to all Smarts rolls and a -3 to all Muscle rolls. On the other hand, your Chutzpah goes *up* by +3. Drunks are bold, but stupid. While you are drunk, you will stumble around and speak in a loud but slurred voice. You'll offer suggestions on how to do things to anyone you see. You'll try to pick fights with creatures who can swat you flat with one pinky. Finally, you might also sing *very* loudly or even start crying and telling other characters that they are your best friend. Fortunately, once the boots are removed, you sober right up. Unfortunately, you have a terrible hangover and suffer 1d

points of My Head Is Going To Explode And A Dog Must Have Slept In My Mouth Damage.

The Bad Bad Hat

This hat can be any style the Animator chooses, but no matter the style, it is of very good quality and makes you look very stylish. It also adds a +1 to both your Smarts and Hit Points, for as long as you are wearing it. So, seems like a pretty good piece of headwear, eh? Wrong! Once you attempt *any* offensive combat action (including spellcasting, backstabbing and yelling vicious taunts), the hat will activate one of the following random effects. Animators, roll 1d for . . .

Roll of

- 1 Shapechange into an animal smaller than your original size
- 2 Shrink to 3 inches tall
- 3 Gain 1d X 100 pounds
- 4 Shapechange into an animal larger than your original size
- 5 Age 1d X10 years
- 6 Split into two versions of yourself. One is good, one is evil.

All of these cursed effects last 2d+2 turns. Please be aware that the only way you can remove this evil sombrero is by convincing somebody else to buy it from you. Good luck.

Ring of Plentiful Spellmiscasting

Wearing this ring allows you to cast any *Toon* spell in print, including spells not specific to *Dungeons & Toons*. Unfortunately, the ring will alter the effects of the spells whenever the Animator thinks it would be funny. Naturally, the Animator also chooses how the spell is altered. And just to add insult to injury, once every day the ring will turn you into a muskrat for 3d turns.

The 10-Foot Pole

This is a good stout 10-foot long pole. 1d times a day, it will cause you to sprout eight extra feet, anywhere on your body that the Animator chooses. The effect lasts for 2d turns unless you get Boggled, in which case the extra feet disappear . . . until the next time.

Great Axe of the Screaming Whirlwind

Unlike the Sword of No Hitting, this big bad axe *will* let you hit in combat. You'll hit enemies, friends, innocent bystanders, trees, rocks . . . pretty much everything near you. See, once you swing the axe in combat, it causes you to spin faster and faster and faster (that's where the screaming part comes in) until you are a whirling blur of steely destruction. Once the whirling starts, it lasts for 1d+1 turns and does six hits per turn which do 2d points of Whirling Steely Destruction Damage per hit. The Animator will decide who or what gets whacked on each of the six hits. No doubt other characters will be doing a lot of diving out of your way. After the whirling stops, you'll be very dizzy for 3 turns. Any Zip, Smarts or Muscle rolls done during this time will be at a -3. After 3 turns, you'll be okay again. At least, until the next combat.

Cloak of Unwanted Courage

When you have this cloak on, you'll look very cool and elegant. It even gives a +2 to your armor class. It's too bad

looking cool and elegant and having good armor doesn't count for much when you can't run away from certain doom. The curse of this cloak is activated when you decide that those who run away not only live to fight another, they don't have to deal with all that pain. No, this cloak will cause you to stand and fight no matter how badly you want to chicken out and run. Only Falling Down will break the curse until the next fight. If you want to break the curse and get rid of the cloak forever, the Animator should be able to come up with a screwy quest that will do the trick.

The Belt of the Shared Wedgie

This belt's curse doesn't activate during combat . . . it can activate at any time the Animator thinks it would be funny (remember what we said about Animators feeling evil?) or inconvenient to you and those around you. Here's how it works: The belt will glow bright green and a loud voice will yell out "WEDGIE!". Then, every character and creature within 60 feet of you (including you, naturally) gets a wedgie that does 1d+2 of Cursed Magic Wedgie Damage. It doesn't matter if creatures aren't wearing underwear or pants, they still get a wedgie. Naturally, this will put everyone in a bad mood and will have them looking at you and that glowing belt. Have a nice day!

ZRM EPYZ VBBPSABO XPIQEB MTMK!

A IADM WQFFIMY.

AB WVKZAXQIVK, A IADM WQFFIMY VBH RAHHMB
EMYYVOMY ZRVZ IMZ ZRM WIVSMKY (ABYZMVH PL ZRM
XRVKVXZMKY) WKPTM ZRMAK ABZMIIMXZQVI EMZZIM.
YQKM, ZRMKM'Y YPEM YVZAYLVXZAPB AB DBPGABO SPQ
KPIIMH ZRVZ XKAZAXVI YQXXMY KAORZ GRMB SPQ
BMMHMH AZ, NQZ SPQ EVS LMMI ZRVZ GVV JQYZ ZRM
IQXD PL ZRM HAXM. PB ZRM PZRMK RVBH, GRMB SPQ VY V
WIVSMK LAOQKM PQZ ZRM KAHHIM, WQFFIM, PK XIQM,
ZRMB ZRVZ'Y V TAXZPKS ZRVZ NMIPBOY MBZAKMIS ZP
SPQ.

PL XPQKYM, WQFFIMY VIYP RVTM KMVI XPEWIA XVZAPBY.
AZ'Y MBZAKMIS WPYYANIM ZP EVDM ZRME ZPP
HALLAXQIZ, VENAQQPY, PK PNZQYM. RMKM, ZRMB, VKM
V LMG RABZY LPK EVDABO WQFFIMY VBH RAHHMB
EMYYVOMY GPKD LPK SPQK OVEM.

YPEM ZAWY:

- AL WPYYANIM, OATM XPEWIA XVZMH WQFFIMY VZ ZRM MBH PL V YMYAPB. ("ZRM PIH EVB YVSY, 'NMLPKM SPQ XVB MBZMK ZRM ZPEN PL ZPP HVBO EVBS XPABY, SPQ EQYZ LAKYZ XPEWIMZM . . . ZRM EVZXRYZAXD WQFFIM!" ZP NM XPBZABQMH . . .") LPK YPEMGRVZ YAEWIMK WQFFIMY, SPQ EAORZ NM VNIM ZP OATM ZRME NMLPKM EMVI PK YBVXD NKMVDY. KMOVKHIMYY, SPQ'KM AHMVIIS ZKSABO ZP VTPAH V YAZQVZAPB GRMKM ZRM MBZAKM WIVSABO OKPQW AY YZQXD WPKABO PTMK SPQK VKXVBM XPBQBHKQE . . . MYWMXAVIIS AL SPQ XVB'Z ZMII GRMZRMK ZRMS'KM ZRABDABO PK NPKMH.
- VOVAB, AL WPYYANIM, ZKS ZP EVDM WQFFIMY PKOVBA ZP ZRM OVEM. AZ EAORZ EVDM YMBYM ZP LAOQKM PQZ ZRVZ ZRM BPZMY PL V YPBO LPKE V EMYVOM RAHHMB NS ZRM XPEWPYMK (O-V-N-M / H-M-L-V-X-M-H / M-O-O), NQZ AZ HPMYB'Z EVDM YMBYM ZP RVTM V EPHMKB WPW XQIZQKM KAHHIM AB V RAYZPKAXVI VBXAMBZ KPEM OVEM. (PL XPQKYM, AB V CMBV-MYUQM OVEM ZRVZ EAORZ EVDM WMKLMXZ YMBYM . . .)
- EVDM YQKM ZRMKM VKM "MYXVWM KPQZMY." GRVZ RVWWMBY AL BP PBM XVB LAOQKM PQZ ZRM WQFFIM? ZKQYZ EM LKPE XKQMI, WVABLQI [MCWMKAMBXM](#): SPQ BMMH ZP RVTM V NVXDQW WIVB. EVSNM YPEMPBM MIYM XVB RMIW YPITM AZ PK WKPTAHM V XIQM. EVSNM ZRM RMKPMY JQYZ HPB'Z OMZ ZP MBZMK ZRM ZPEN PL ZPP HVBO EVBS XPABY . . . PK AL ZRMS HP, EVSNM ZRMS RVTM V EPKM HALLAXQIZ ZAEM IVZMK PB. BPBM PL ZRMYM PWZAPBY VKM VY YVZAYLSABO VY ZRM WIVSMKY YPITABO ZRABOY ZRMEYMITMY, NQZ ZRMS'KM VII EPKM YVZAYLSABO ZRVB ZRM VHTMBZQKM XPEABO ZP V YXKMMXRABO RVIZ.
- VY VB MCZMBYAPB PL ZRAY, XPHYAHMK ZKSABO ZP XKMVZM ABXKMEMBZVI WQFFIMY PL ABXKMVYABO HALLAXQIZS VBH KMGVKH. ZRQY ZRM RMKPMY EAORZ NM WKMYMBZMH GAZR V IAYZ PL 10 KAHHIMY PQZYAHM V HPPK; ZRM LAKYZ (VBH MUYAMYZ) PBM MBVNIMY ZRM HPPK ZP NM PWMBMH, ZRM YMXPBH PBM HVMXZATVZMY ZRM ZKVV PB ZRM HPPK RVBHIM, ZRM ZRAKH EVS DMMW ZRM HPPK LKPE YUQMV DABO IPQHIS VY ZRM HPPK AY PWMBMH, VBH YP PB. ZRM IVYZ (VBH EPYZ HALLAXQIZ) PBM EAORZ XVQYM V TVIQVNIM VBH/PK WPGMKLQI PNJMXZ ZP NMXPEN TAYANIM VBH YPIAH; VIZRPQOR BPZ BMXMYVVK, AZ GPQIH NM BAXM . . .

(Editor's Note: As you may have noticed, my column is even less comprehensible than normal this week. For those of you without the patience to print this out and work it out on your own -- and I certainly can't blame you - - you can either point your Java-enabled browser to <http://www.ics.uci.edu/~eppstein/cryptogram/>, or click below to view the solution.)

[The Answer](#)

(Note that I do not promise the solution will make any more sense . . .)

GAZR ZRAY ZMXRBAUQM, ZRM OE GPQIH BMMH ZP HMXAHM GRVZ GPQIH RVWWMB AL
(YVS) ZRM RMKPMY XPQIH VBYGMK ZRM YACZR WVKZ, NQZ BPZ ZRM LALZR. HP ZRMS
BMMH ZP VBYGMK ZRME VII YMUQMBZAVIIS, PK XVB ZRMS JQEW VKPQBH?

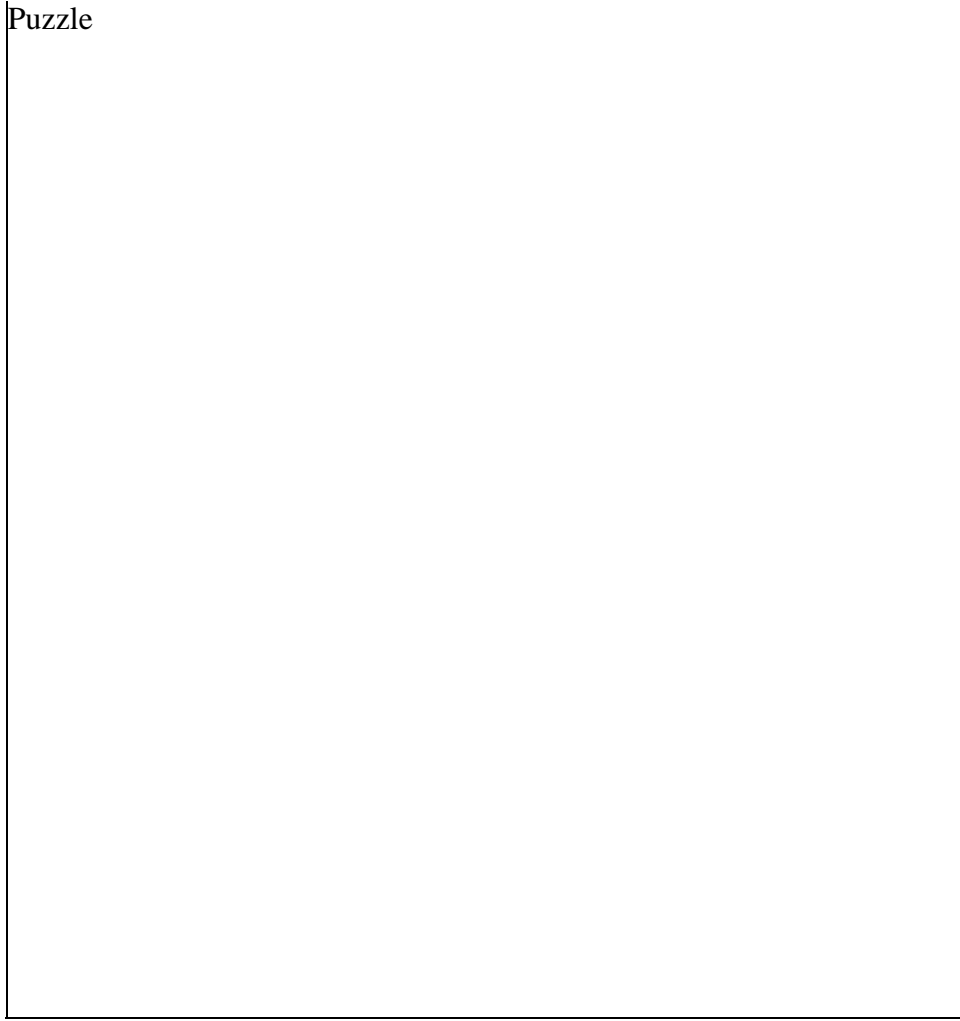
YPEM YAEWIM WQFFIMY:

ZRM NIVBD YRMMZ PL WVWMK. PL XPQKYM ZRMKM'Y V EMYVOM RAHHMB PB ZRMKM, NQZ
ZRMKM'Y YZAI V TAYXMKVI ZRKAI AB QBXPTMKABO AZ. WMKRVWY ZRM MUYAMYZ VBH EPYZ
"XIVYYAX" AY ZRM QBHMK-YRMMZ; YAEWIS GKAZM ZRM KMVI EMYVOM PB ZPW PL VBPZRMK
YRMMZ PL WVWMK GAZR V NVII-WPABZ WMB, ZRMB HAYXVKH ZRVZ ZPW YRMMZ. ZRM NPZZPE
YRMMZ GAI XPBZVAB VB AEWKMYAPB PL ZRM EMYVOM, GRAXR XVB MAZRMK NM KMVH
QBHMK OPPH IAORZ, PK KMTMVIMH AL V WMBXAI IMVH PK XRVKXPVI AY KQNNMH YAHMGVSY
PB AZ. (VY VB VYAHM, A"TM *BMTMK* OPZZMB ZRM GRPIM "IMEPB-JQAXM-VY-ABTAYANIM-ABD"
ZRABO ZP GPKD. AL SPQ RVTM NMMB VNIM ZP XPBYAYZMBZIS, ZRMB ZRVZ EAORZ NM V
GABBABO ZMXRBAUQM . . . MYWMXAVIIS AL ZRMKM VKM XVBHIMY AB ZRM KPPE. JQYZ NM
XVKMLQI BPZ ZP NQKB ZRM RPQYM HPGB.)

AL SPQ GVBZ ZP PNLQYXVZM ZRAY XIVYYAX WQFFIM, YAEWIS OATM ZRM NIVBD YRMMZ PL
WVWMK ZP ZRM WIVSMKY VEAH PZRMK (YMMEABOIS EPKM AEWPKZVBZ) XIQMY. V 3-WVOM
YZVWIMH HPXQEMBZ -- GRMKM ZRM NPZZPE WVOM PBIS RVY ZRM IVYZ LMG GPKHY -- AY IMY
IADMIS ZP VKPQYM YQYWAXAPB . . . MTMB ZRPQOR ZRVZ IVYZ WVOM EVS XPBZVAB ZRM EPYZ
AEWPKZVBZ RAHHMB ABLPKEVZAPB!

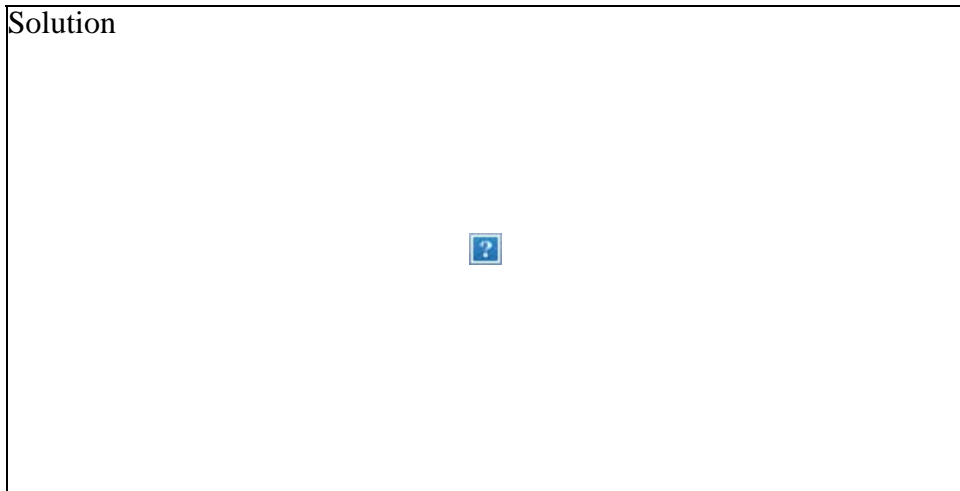
ZKVBYWVKMBXS WQFFIMY. ZRAY AY VBPZRMK YAEWIM PBM ZRVZ'Y WKMZZS YVZAYLSABO.
OATM SPQK WIVSMKY ZGP YMWVKVZM HPXQEMBZY (MAZRMK VII VZ PBXM PK PTMK ZRM
XPQKYM PL YMTMKVI VHTMBZQKMY) ZRVZ YMME ZP XPBZVAB OANNMKAYR.

Puzzle



ZRM LQII EMYVOM XVB PBIS NM KMTMVIMH GRMB ZRM ZGP HPXQEMBZY VKM WIVXMH PBM
VZPW VBPZRMK, ZRMB RMIH QW ZP ZRM IAORZ. (LQII EMYVOM KMTMVIMH ZRVBDY ZP ZRM
EVOAX PL AEVOM-MHAZABO YPLZGVKM!)

Solution



(ZRAY WQFFIM XVB NM LQKZRMK PNLQYXVZMH NS XPBLQYABO ZRM PKAMBZVZAPB. AL ZRMKM
VKM PZRMK IMOANIM EMYVOMY KAORZ-YAHM QW PB ZRM ZGP WVKZY, NQZ ZRM "OISWRY"
VKM WKABZMH QWYAHM-HPGB PB PBM PL ZRME, ZRMB V GPQIH-NM HMXPHMK EAORZ NM
ZKAXDMH.

ZP XKMVZM YQXR V HPXQEMZB, LAKYZ LAOQKM PQZ GRVZ ZRM LQII EMYVOM AY. ZRMB LAOQKM PQZ RPG MVXR IMZZMK XVB NM GKAZZMB AB WVKZY, VBH GKAZM ZRM LAKYZ WVKZ PL ZRM EMYVOM HPGB. ZRMB WIVXM ZRM YMXPBH YRMMZ PB ZPW PL ZRM LAKYZ (AHMVIIS SPQ'KM QYABO V OPPH IAORZ YPQKXM, PK WMKRVWY MTMB V IAORZ ZVNIM), VBH LAII AB ZRM KMEVABY PL MVXR IMZZMK. KMEMENMK ZRVZ SPQ XVB PTMKIVW MVXR XRVKVXZMK LPK EPKM XPBLQYAPB; VB "R" XPQIH NM GKAZZMB VY "-|" PB PBM YRMMZ VBH "-|" PB ZRM PZRMK, KMISABO PB ZRM KMHVMK ZP PTMKIVW ZRM EAHMIM YZME. VIYP KMEMENMK ZRVZ MVXR IMZZMK XVB WKPNNIS NM HPBM AB HALLMKMBZ GVSY; SPQ XPQIH HKVG VBPZRMK "R" VY LAKYZ V ZPW XQW (IADM "|_|") VBH ZRMB V NPZZPE XQW.

JQYZ KMEMENMK GRMB XKMVZABO ZRAY WQFFIM ZP EVDM YQKM ZRM ZPW YRMMZ AY LAKEIS VZZVXRMH ZP ZRM NPZZPE PBM; AL ZRM ZPW YRMMZ YRALZY GRAIM GKAZABO ZRMB ZRM ZGP WVKZY GPB'Z IABM QW KAORZ.

ZABS GKAZABO. VBPZRMK OPPH GVS ZP RAHM V EMYVOM LPK ZRM WIVSMKY AY YAEWIS ZP GKAZM AZ YEVII. AL SPQ RVTM V HMZVAIMH WAXZQKM ZRVZ SPQ'KM RVBHABO ZRM WIVSMKY, ZRMB V NAZZS EMYVOM GKAZZMB VIPBO ZRM NPKHMK EVS OP QBBPZAXMH LPK V ZAEM. YEVII YXKVWY PL WVWMK GAZR NAO ABLPKEVZAPB (IADM V WRPBM BQENMK) XVB XPBXMVI ZABS GKAZABO. VBH YP PB. (ZRVBDY ZP IVYMK WKABZMK ZMXRBIPOS, AZ'Y WPYYANIM ZP WKABZ YPEMZRABO VZ VB AEWYYANIS YEVII -- NQZ YZAII KMHVNMIM -- LPBZ YAFM.)

VBH ZRMB (PL XPQKYM) ZRMKM VKM VIGVSY **XKSWZPOKVEY** . . . ZP XKMVZM V TMKS MVYS XKSWZPOKVE, GKAZM SPQK EMYVOM VY BPKEVI, ZRMB WKABZ AZ GAZR V YZKVBOM YSENPIAX LPBZ (IADM GABOHABOY PK GMNHABOY). PL XPQKYM, AL SPQ HP ZRAY, EVDM YQKM SPQ YZAXD GAZR VII QVWMKXVYM (PK IPGMKXVYM) XRVKVXZMKY; AZ'Y JQYZ BPZ LVAK ZP RVTM VB QVWMKXVYM "V" RVTM V HALLMKMBZ YSENPI ZRVB V IPGMKXVYM PBM.

VBH, VOVAB, EVDM YQKM SPQ WKPTAHM SPQK KMHVMKY, MK, WIVSMKY GAZR VIZMKBVZATMY.

RVWWS VWKAI LPPI'Y HVS!

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Ogrethulhu Set 1**, back of box.*

(Three stars) "As you open the door the magic-user DIES!! Then a . . ."

"Whadda ya mean my mage DIES???"

"He just sort of choked and then died. I guess it as [sic] a trap of some kind."

The Secret of My Success

"The important thing to remember when you build your reputation for occult knowledge is that you have to give the impression of knowing something -- and it has to be occult. . . . [T]ell everyone what your alleged secret is, but in such an obscure, long-winded, and baffling way that nobody realizes you're spouting vintage B.S. This is the route that most occultists have taken down the ages. People will rarely accuse you of talking nonsense, especially if you make it sound impressive and toss in a few uncheckable facts and Latin quotations."

-- P.J. Owens and Alexander C. Rae, *Bluff Your Way in the Occult*

If there is one question that I am constantly asked as the official High Weirdness columnist for this august publication, it is, "Are we actually going to get a column out of you this week, you overrated pain in my editorial tuchus?" The answer to this question, sadly, is lost in the mists of time and space. If there is another, more polite question, however, that one is often, "How do you manage to write this stuff?" or, occasionally, "Where do you get your ideas?" (These two questions are often subsumed into a meta-question such as "Are you on drugs?" The answer to this meta-question is "Sadly, no.") I feel that my readership deserves an answer to at least one of these questions, and so I shall attempt to provide one, in the spirit of the April Fool's holiday, in the form of a patter song.

And it goes a little something like this:

"And now that I've introduced myself, I should like to have some idea of what's going on."

-- the Major-General, in *The Pirates of Penzance*, by William S. Gilbert

This is the very model of a Kenneth Hite conspiracy,
Mixed up between the Reptoids and the Manichaeic heresy,
It starts with lost Lemuria and filters through the chaff a bit,
But soon involves a visit from a brazen head named [Baphomet](#);
The Prieuré de Sion and the Masons are pedestrian,
Until you add the [Airships](#) and their crews [ultraterrestrial](#).
And tie it to the Cathars and the Skull and Bonesmen's vessel Taft,
Who subsidized Majestic-Twelve, and aided the Thule Gesellschaft.

Whose [green-gloved](#) Masters dominate the [elves](#) from [Merrie Robin's](#) band
With backup from the Nazis in their saucer base, [Neuschwabenland](#).
In short, from [El Dorado](#) to the bottom of the [Thera](#) sea,
This is the very model of a Kenneth Hite conspiracy.

It's all set down in iambic pentameter [Shakespearean](#).
Commissioned by the [School of Night](#) to frustrate plots Iberian;
John Dee put it in cipher in the [Voynich incunabulum](#).
It's even in the blatherings of Edgar Cayce's pabulum.
[American mythologies](#) that some might base a comic on,
Appear in opaque pages of the eldritch [Necronomicon](#).
Masonic Mozart operas and jingles sound the faint refrain,
Which swells into the leitmotif in minuets by [Saint-Germain](#).

So I distill from sources electronic and librarious
The secrets of the Masters both heroic and nefarious;
And then I just [bisociate](#) the things I in the [mirror](#) see,
And get the very model of a Kenneth Hite conspiracy.

It's really not as difficult as weekly reading makes it seem
I just throw in the [Grail](#), or [manticores](#), or maybe Nephilim.
It hardly takes a grounding in semantics or [Enochian](#)

To know Agartha's Pepsi-ish and Shangri-La is [Coke-ian](#);
And once I've picked a side between the [Templars](#) and Hospitallers,
I put Heinlein on my team and the Kennedys on Hit-a-ler's;
Unless I swap them all around in grandiose alternacy
To build a [crazy background](#) full of Tesla-ish Jules Verne-acy.

And if I'm ever desperate for things to write a column on,
I claim that Gilbert's lyrics hold the [kabbalah of Solomon](#).
Add twists and permutations that would discommode a Pharisee,
And that's the very model of a Kenneth Hite conspiracy.

Song Combos for *In Nomine* and *GURPS In Nomine*

Making New Powers with Old Parts

by Perry M. Lloyd

Most, if not all, of us in the world of gaming are familiar with a martial arts standby: the Combo. A combo can be as simple as "Punch + Kick" to "Kick + Punch + Kick" to "Hand Parry + Arm Lock + Elbow Strike" and eventually "Spinning Punch + Axe Kick + Explosive Fireball Blast." For those searching for a way to do more damage in *In Nomine* without resorting to mundane high-powered weaponry, or for those looking to create new abilities without generating long lists of totally new powers, Song Combos may provide the answer.

Using *GURPS Martial Arts* and martial arts training as a model, martial arts combos are multiple actions that are combined and learned as nearly one fluid motion. This can be a motion repeated or combined with other motions. Why not do the same with Songs? In fact, why stop there, why shouldn't the natural Symphonic effect be that such Songs sung in "combination" often merge and create new and unique effects? These "combos" (called "polyphonies" by Jean's Servitors and Vapulans) possess characteristics of their component Songs, but combined for more power, at the expense of more Essence.

There are two kinds of combos: Two-Song combos and Three-Song combos, in which either two or three Songs are combined. The major advantages of combos are the unique effects they can produce and the speed with which they may accomplish several effects at once.

Point Cost

Two-Song combos have a 3-point purchasing cost, and Three-Song combos have a 5-point purchasing cost. The combo is then purchased as though it were a separate Song.

The GM may wish to reduce the purchasing cost when two or more of the Songs are of the same type, such as combining the Ethereal and Corporeal Songs of Healing. A total point cost reduction of 1 is suggested if two Songs are of a given type, or 2 if all three are of the same type of Song. The GM may also allow for a reduced point cost if all the Songs are of the same plane (corporeal, ethereal or celestial); the suggested total point cost reduction is 1 for two Songs, 2 for three Songs. This sort of point cost reduction is not appropriate when the same version of the same Song is being repeated within the combo for greater and faster effect (such as with Laser Blast and Fatal Blow, below).

Learning Combos in Play

When learning a combo, the character must make an Intelligence roll at -4 to learn the combo. The CD of this roll determines the maximum level at which the combo may be initially purchased. If the character knows at least one of its component Songs at 4 higher, add +1 to the roll. If the character knows all of its component Songs at 4 or higher, add another +1 to the roll. If the character knows all of its component Songs at 5 or 6, add yet another +1 to the roll. (These bonuses are cumulative.)

Example: Ghutrile, Calabite of Dark Humor, would like to learn a three-Song combo called Beleth's Kiss, a combo of the Ethereal and Celestial Songs of Entropy with Numinous Corpus: Tongue. He cuts a deal with a Lilim Songmaster of Nightmares (*Liber Canticorum*, p. 25) who can teach him the combo. After spending a 2-point purchasing cost (the GM allows him to take a -1 pt cost reduction for common Song type), succeeding his Intelligence-4 roll with a CD of 4, and gaining a level 2 Geas (as payment to the Lilim for teaching him the Song), he now can spend up to 4 points in Beleth's Kiss (GM willing).

Nuts and Bolts

When combining Songs with differing duration, areas of effect, Essence cost and disturbance created, a balance must be struck between the qualities of the component Songs when designing the combo.

Duration

Generally, combining a Song with an instant duration and a Song with an extended duration will result in a combo which is no longer instant, but no longer as extended either. Generally, Songs endure for a base duration: an instant, rounds, minutes, or hours. Each of these base durations is multiplied by skill level, Forces, check digit, or whatever.

There is no handy formula for generating combos' durations mathematically, so here's a rule of thumb: keep the duration near to the shortest duration of the component Songs. For example, Beleth's Kiss is composed of two instant Songs and one that lasts check digit hours. To strike a balance, keep the multiplier of the base duration (the check digit) the same, and shift the base duration down to combat rounds. Combining a Song that lasts rounds with one that lasts hours should result in a Song that lasts minutes. If the component Songs include one Song that lasts minutes and another that lasts rounds, you could drop the base duration down to rounds, but increase the modifier, perhaps from Forces or skill level to a characteristic or even total Forces.

Area of Effect

Songs' areas of effect vary as well, most affecting a single target or area within a certain range. While one shortens the duration of Songs combined, one extends the area of effect. Thus, combining the Ethereal Song of Tongues with the Ethereal Song of Healing would allow the performer to heal anyone he can make mental contact with (Healing Thoughts, below).

Essence Cost

The Essence cost of the combo should be the sum cost to perform all the Songs. The GM may allow the characters to pay more points for combos that are more Essence "efficient," generally an extra character point per level for every point of Essence reduction, but this should probably be limited to combos of Songs of the same type (such as combining the Corporeal and Ethereal Songs of Harmony). In no instance should the Essence cost drop below the number of Songs combined. In fact, some GMs may wish to increase the Essence cost of combos to maintain power balance.

Example: The components Songs of "Beleth's Kiss" (see below) are the Ethereal and Celestial Songs of Entropy and Numinous Corpus: Tongue, costing 1, 2, and 1 Essence respectively. Therefore Beleth's Kiss costs 4 Essence to perform.

Disturbance

The easiest to combine . . . just add it all up! The disturbance of the combo is the sum total of the disturbance created by its component Songs.

Example: Beleth's Kiss' component Songs, the Ethereal and Celestial Songs of Entropy and NC: Tongues, generate CD + total Forces, CD + total Forces, and no disturbance, respectively. Therefore, Beleth's Kiss does disturbance equal to twice the sum of CD + total Forces of the performer.

Performance

When performing a combo, the level of the combo is added to the lowest of the Forces its Songs are combined with. Since Beleth's Kiss' component Songs are combined with Corporeal, Ethereal, and Celestial Forces, Ghutrile must add

the level of his combo with the lowest of his Forces, his Corporeal Forces. (He has two Corporeal Forces, making his base target number to perform the combo a 5.) The check digit of the initiating roll counts as the check digit all of its component Songs.

The normal rules of Song performance (*In Nomine*, pp. 46-47) apply to combos. This means that combos that include multiple Songs of the same type (such as the ethereal and corporeal Songs of healing) should receive an automatic bonus to the CD (+1 for two such Songs in combo, +2 for three). Performing a combo should take the entire round, however. Songs which are made up of more than three Songs (see below) should take more than one round to perform.

Using Combos in the campaign

Combos can be quite powerful, granting an instant effect a longer duration, turning a touch or ranged effect into an area effect, or simply allowing for more power to be swung at once. Therefore, it is suggested that the GM keep most combos for use by NPCs, and to use them as exceptional rewards.

Depending on how the GM wishes to run the show, combos can be rare or commonplace. Perhaps only Superiors can teach combos (e.g. not Songmasters); perhaps certain combos are only commonly known to certain Words and the secrets of their performance closely guarded. On the other hand, the GM may allow his celestials to try and make up combos "on the fly," and render combos so commonplace that normal single Songs are rarely heard. Another option is to allow celestials to combine any number of Songs . . . perhaps upwards of six or more, taking multiple rounds to perform with spectacular (and loud) effects!

Sample Combos

Beleth's Kiss

Three-Song combo

Numinous Corpus: Tongue, Ethereal Song of Entropy, Celestial Song of Entropy

When sung, this Song summons forth a vile tongue that inflicts the effects of the ethereal and celestial Songs of Entropy when it strikes its target. A favorite use of this Song by demons of Nightmares is to engage the victim in a (forced) French kiss before unleashing the attack. It costs 4 Essence to perform, lasts check digit combat rounds, and does twice CD + performer's total Forces in Disturbance.

Healing Thoughts

Two-Song combo

Ethereal Song of Tongues and Ethereal Song of Healing

When sung, the performer may send a mental message to anyone within range (same as the Ethereal Song of Tongues) that heals person's Mind hits! The duration is effectively instant but permanent (as per the Ethereal Song of Healing), it costs 2 Essence to perform and does the check digit in Disturbance. This would be a favorite of Blandine's angels.

Lover's Gaze

Two-Song combo

Ethereal Song of Attraction and Celestial Song of Charm

When sung, the performer must make eye contact with the victim, who may resist the effects of a successful performance with a Will roll, his will reduced by the initial CD of this combo's performance. A drawback of this combo is that it can only be used to reduce the victim's Will in order to resist the Song of Attraction, and the victim can be made only to become madly, passionately attracted to the performer. Still, Andrealphus' demons could quite like it. It costs 3 Essence to perform, lasts a number of minutes equal to the performer's total Forces times the CD, and does twice the CD in Disturbance. The effective check digit for determining duration can be increased by spending extra Essence in the initial performance, one Essence per effective check digit bonus.

Total Freedom

Two-Song combo

Corporeal Song of Motion and Numinous Corpus: Wings

This powerful combo grants the user the ability to move a number of yards per turn of his normal running speed (Agility times 6) plus a number of yards equal to his level in the combo, the sum multiplied by the extra Essence spent +1, plus Agility time 10 yards (using the updated Numinous Corpus: Wings mechanics from *Liber Canticorum*). It costs 2 Essence, lasts CD minutes, and does CD Disturbance to the symphony.

Example: Arael has Total Freedom/5 and Agility 8. He spends 3 Essence, one extra Essence to boost it. His flight speed is his normal running speed (8 x 6) of 48 plus his level in the combo (5) (48+5=53), times the extra Essence+1 (53x2=106), plus his Agility (8) x10 (80). So his final speed is 106+80=186 yards a turn. A turn is 5 seconds, so he's moving at 37.2 yards a second, or about twice that (74) in miles per hour. Go, Arael!

Laser Strike

Two-Song combo

Celestial Song of Light, Celestial Song of Light and Celestial Song of Light

This combo allows the performer to spend 3 to 9 points of Essence to produce a powerful celestial light blast as per the normal Song, doing three times the sum of CD + Essence spent in damage. Additionally, the victim is dazzled with a penalty of -6 rather than -2, and observers get a bonus equal to the check digit of the attack to their Perception roll to notice the attack's origin. Some versions of this combo feature a tri-beam effect, while others combine to form a triple-thick coherent beam. It costs 3 to 9 points of Essence to perform, is instantaneous, and does no Disturbance to the Symphony.

Fatal Blow

Two-Song combo

Celestial Song of Charm and Celestial Song of Charm

Essentially, this combo is used to affect both the target's Will and Perception with one performance, making this combo a must to swiftly gain the edge in Celestial combat. Of course, it's expensive to perform. It costs 4 Essence, lasts a number of rounds equal to the performer's Celestial Forces, and does twice the check digit in Disturbance.

Creating New Combos in Game Play

To design a new combo in game play requires the character to have the new skill Harmonize.

Harmonize

(defaults to Intelligence-6)

Prerequisite: Songmaster attunement

This skill is used by a character to actually design a new combo. If combos are a rarity in the campaign, then most celestials will not even be aware that such a skill is possible. Normal use of the skill allows the celestial to design a two-Song combo. Use of the skill at -2 allows for the design of a three-Song combo. This only creates the blueprint, the celestial score, of the combo. Actually learning to perform the combo requires practice and another successful Harmonize roll at -4. Only one such roll is allowed per day, and at least one hour of study is required per attempt. The CD of the roll determines that initial level at which the Songmaster may purchase the combo. The combo's level can be improved over time, as per a Song. All component Songs to be included in the combo must be known at level 5 at least.

***GURPS In Nomine* conversion**

One possible mode of conversion would be to use the Combo rules on page 171 of *GURPS Compendium 1*, borrowing from *GURPS Martial Arts*. Point cost is 4 points for a two-Song combo, and 6 points for a six-Song combo. Instead of rolling once to activate all component Songs, however, you would roll versus each Song separately, figuring the effects of each Song into the overall game effect. If using these mechanics, it would make much more sense that the Songs do not merge to create new effects, but are merely performed in rapid succession. On the other hand, perhaps performing them in such rapid succession creates a Symphonic Polyphonic Harmonious Effect (or whatever you wish to call it) which generates the combo's unique properties! The GM may alternatively choose to rule that the character roll only once, against the lowest skill level of the component Songs.

On the other hand, the GM may choose to make the performance of the combo a separate M/VH Song (use the character's lowest level of Power Investiture associated with the combo's component Songs) with no default. Of course, the combo could even be purchased as a Hard Maneuver (*CI*, p. 165) defaulting to lowest of the combo's component Songs -4.

For something much truer to the *In Nomine* system above, consider taking a look at S. John Ross's rules for Linking spells: <http://home.iu.net/~caroth/SJohn/Custom.htm> . Since in *GURPS* Songs are based off the mechanics for spells, this system for combining spells should be quite applicable to Songs as well. While he suggests using the least desirable aspects of the combined spells to maintain power balance, Some GMs may prefer striking a balance between the Songs to represent a truer blend. The choice is yours.

Final Notes

Combos can be abused . . . horribly, horribly, horribly abused. On the other hand, that's part of the fun. Of course, actually creating new combos requires the Songmaster attunement (a 10-point attunement reserved normally for the Word-bound that allows you to teach Songs to others) to maintain power balance. But be creative; combine the Corporeal Song of Attraction with something, or the Celestial Song of Tongues, or even the Songs of Projection. Don't be afraid to dare the impossible dream of discovering the ultimate combo.

The Phantom Cabriolet

A Warehouse 23/Supporting Cast Crossover

by Owen Kerr

Loomis: "Please, God . . .! We need a cab . . .!"
--*Quick Change* (Warner Brothers, 1990)

There comes a time in many campaigns when the party requires rapid transportation from Where They Are to Where They Need To Be. If the circumstances are dire enough, you may want to produce the archetype of the people-mover: the Phantom Cabriolet.

The vehicle-for-hire is a feature in many works of media: traveling through the London fog in the hackney coaches hired by Sherlock and Watson, meandering along with the not-too-tightly-bolted-down Reverend Jim Ignatowski from the aptly-titled television series *Taxi*, or flagging down Harry Canyon, working hack, part-time philosopher, and thick-skinned poet in the grimy post-modern animated world of *Heavy Metal*.

Every group has its heroes, its myths, its if-you're-good-and-listen-to-your-mother stories. The gypsies of the road are no exception.

The Phantom Cabriolet is every coach from Dodge City that arrived with the medicine, just in time to save Miss Kitty, every cab that was able to get the future Nobel-laureate to the hospital before her appendix could burst, and every hired rig driving nineteen hours to get the parolee back home on time for Little Becky's birthday.

The Phantom Cabriolet is not constrained by temporal convention. It can appear in any aspect of the multiverse, at any point in any timeline. The Cab follows its own rules, and none other; the ultimate gypsy cab, serving the Greater Known Universe Metro Area and Parts North. The Cabriolet is neither person, place, nor thing. Rather, it is the sum of all three components into a greater whole; a Campbellian myth made flesh, blood, and good Detroit steel.

The Driver

The Driver is always described as a man of average height for his ethnicity, dressed in down-at-heel, archaic finery. Age and ethnic group depend entirely upon his surroundings and the expectations of the Passengers. He will be as taciturn or as garrulous as circumstances require.

As the Coachman, he has appeared as a sturdily-built Magyar of indeterminate age, with ferocious sideburns, luxuriant mustache, top hat, greatcoat, and great boots so old that they can barely hold bootblack. Another aspect of the Coachman is the gap-toothed leering Eastender, hair fog-slicked and long of nose.

His appearance as the Cabbie has been much varied, from the oiled-and-turbaned Sikh with a brilliant smile and photographic memory of the works of Shakespeare, to the Archie Bunker look-alike brimming with compassionate conservatism.

The Puller (rickshaw driver) is a polyglot Asian of a local minority group, no matter where he is found (in Edo, he's Chinese; in Nanjing or Chinatown, he's Korean; in Seoul, he's Thai . . . get it?). His loincloth is silk, his jacket threadbare brocade, with the legs of a triathlete, the soul of a philosopher-king, and soles of leathery hide.

The Trucker is not, by any means, "average size." He's 6'6", part-Lakota Sioux, part-French, all-American. The buttons on his shirt are real mother-of-pearl; his jeans are stitched with hair-fine bronze and silver wire. His cowboy boots are made of three different types of leather, and there's a raven feather hanging from the rear-view mirror.

There is but one exception to the "nice, but shabby" clothing rule: rarely, the Driver will appear as the Chauffeur: trim white-blond hair, Aryan features, round mirrored wire-rimmed glasses, immaculate uniform and hat.

The Vehicle

"When this baby hits eighty-eight miles per hour . . ."

The Driver's vehicle is always a classic example of its type, whether auto, hansom, rickshaw, or carriage. It is invariably large, fast, expensive, conservative, slightly shabby, eccentrically maintained, and at least twenty years out of date. The Vehicle has ample space for all passengers and luggage, and those within will be struck by the tranquility of the interior. The appointments seem designed to place the passengers at ease, and are certainly conducive to intellectual pursuits. The compartment is cool and dim, though there is always light enough by which to read. Tired passengers sleep easily in the Vehicle, and rarely complain of muscle aches upon waking. Smokers will find that natural airflow keeps the compartment fresh and free of smoke.

The Vehicle is more resilient than other vehicles of its ilk, and is capable of weathering all but the most adverse of circumstances. The Vehicle also handles better than it should, appearing as nimble as something half its size. In modern automotive terms, the Vehicle would look and feel like a 1955 Rolls-Royce limousine, take damage like a Brinks truck, and handle like a Porsche.

Powers and Abilities

The Driver has all technical knowledge necessary to successfully maneuver his Vehicle in any mundane circumstance, and in several that may be best described as esoteric. Applicable skills may include Driving/Auto, Driving/Carriage, Combat Driver, Animal Handling, Veterinarian, Teamster, Auto Repair, and so on. Any skill relating directly to making the Vehicle perform to the best of its ability is fair game.

The Driver is also known to have knowledge of armed- and unarmed-combat techniques that would make the average Israeli paratrooper shake his head in awe and envy. The Driver may carry any weapon appropriate to his current persona, in accordance to the time and culture, and suitable for the given task. In other words, just because he knows the particulars of the katana, he's much more likely to pull a Colt .45 ACP in Al Capone's Chicago, or a rigging knife in Victoria's Eastcheap.

The martial skills of the Driver are more for offense than defense. The Driver, while not impervious to damage, will never be injured badly enough that he can no longer drive. A badly-injured Driver may disappear for a while, and will show no sign of his old injuries upon his return.

As has been implied, the Cabriolet has the ability to travel at will through time. This will usually manifest as the ability to get to the destination at exactly the right time. No matter what sort of delays occur at the terminus (weather delaying a flight, security checkpoints slowing entrance to the White House, the parade blocking traffic), the passengers will arrive in just enough time to overcome their obstacles and to take action at a pivotal moment.

The Rules

The rules under which the Phantom Cabriolet operates are unknown to the masses, and are more unspoken custom than codified law. Seekers after knowledge of the Cabriolet may find the following guidelines within the dusty, old grimoire of choice. Note that the Driver would never be so gauche as to refer to any of these rules as such, saying instead, "My duty requires . . .," "Conscience dictates that . . .," "In my country, one would be expected to . . .," and other such segues into the gist of the matter.

1. The Driver will act to preserve his own existence, and that of the Vehicle.
2. Passengers are the responsibility of the Driver. Once an individual has offered or promised remuneration to the

Driver, he/she/it is a Passenger, beneficiary of the Driver's protection, where necessary.

2a. Protection may come in strange forms.

3. The Passengers place themselves under the authority and jurisdiction of the Driver. In the Vehicle, the Driver is God and King. The Passengers are expected to follow all reasonable directives of the Driver, with alacrity and a minimum of fuss.

3a. Reasonable is defined by the Driver as "that which the Driver determines to be reasonable."

4. The Driver is the sole authority over his Passengers. Others attempting to usurp this authority may be dissuaded with all reasonable force. Flight is also an option to be considered.

4a. See 3a.

5. The Driver is obligated to take his Passengers to their Destination in a prudent and expeditious manner.

6. The Destination is defined as "wherever the Driver feels that the Passengers should truly be." Note that the Destination will usually correspond to where the Passengers feel that they should be, at the time. Usually.

History and Mythology: Folklore of the Driver

There seem to be as many stories about the Driver as there are cars on the road. Some students of the occult claim that he is an aspect of Charon the Boatman, purveyor of the Last Ride. These magi cite as proof his seeming purpose to ensure that everyone gets to their Destination. Others claim that he is the reincarnation or uncorrupted form of St. Christopher, bestowing God's grace on those in the time of their greatest need.

The hackney coach, which was any carriage for hire, was introduced in London c.1605. The first appearance of the Coachman predates this era by at least fifty years, as shown in a letter from one Bishop Charles du Mond to his cousin, Jaques du Mond, a tax-collector and amateur historian, September 1549:

" . . . and as we stood, shaken and bloody from the wreck of the wagon, an apparition coalesced from the morning fog -- a coach, drawn by four magnificent bays, drew up before our forlorn group. The coachman, a man of such fierce aspect that Brother Georges, our chirurgion, fell to his knees and began a litany of abjuration against the Devil and his minions, glared down at us from the height of his perch. His speech, however, was mild, and after a short discussion of our direction and financial state, he agreed to carry us to our goal with all due haste. His accent was strange to even my well-travelled ear, and Brother Georges persevered in his conviction that this was a servant of the Prince of Lies. As later events transpired, I am inclined to agree with the supernatural nature of this driver, but ascribe his nature to the Divine, rather than the opposite . . . "

The Puller first came to light in Japan in 1873, a few short years after the appearance of the jin riki sha. Occult sources also place him on the road from Hiroshima to Okayama, August 4, 1945. No definitive I.D. on the passenger.

The Cabbie made his debut in (where else?) New York City, 1917. Circumstances surrounding the event are unclear, but involved a cold winter night, a de-frocked Catholic priest, a prostitute, and the friendship that was formed in the back of that Yellow Cab.

"Dispatch: Can you drive to the Bronx? Manhattan?

Travis: Anytime. Anywhere.

Dispatch: Do you work on Jewish holidays?

Travis: Anytime. Anywhere."

-- *Taxi Driver* (Columbia Pictures, 1976)

The Cabriolet and its Driver are also known for their stealthy departures. Once the task for which they came is done, they're quietly gone, driving off into the rain, turning the next corner, getting ready for the next fare.

Plot Seeds and Cab Stands

- In an *In Nomine* campaign, the Driver is Shemarab, the Angel of Taxis, a Cherub in Service to Wind (with the Malakite of Creation Attunement). The car, Cab 341, is a sentient mobile Tether, sent on the whims of Janus to where it can do the most good (or wreak the most change). The motive force of the cab is nothing so crude as internal combustion. Rather, Cab 341 is the Corporeal body of its Senechal, Neah-Sheariah, a former Ofanite who loves her job, her partner, her Superior, and her place in the Symphony.
- The PC with the best Driving skills bumps into the Cabriolet -- the Driver is terribly injured from a fight in Another Place. He enlists the PC to temporarily become the Driver, for just one run. "Why me?" "Because you're the only one who can do the job. You think you know what you know by accident? You were made for this, pal, and it's payback time." The PC becomes the avatar of the Driver until the job is done, with all pertinent abilities. The other PCs could come along for what promises to be a wild ride . . . Depending on the new Driver's performance, he or she may be asked to cover for the Driver at some point in the future (or past).
- The heroes in an on-going fantasy campaign have been charged with a mighty quest: to deliver/destroy/return the Holy MacGuffin/Artifact of Evil/Legacy of the Ancients to its proper place. One problem. No one knows where that rightful place lies. The Oracle spoke of He Who Travels Among The Hidden Ways, who could take the noble questors to this fated destination. Second problem: said Traveler has vanished from the ken of mortal men. The goal now is to find this mysterious person (or being!) and to gain his assistance. Maybe if they asked that old man with the four-seater cart . . .

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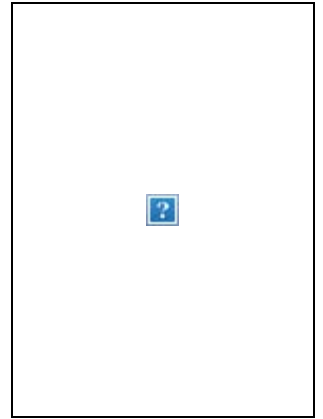
Pyramid Review

Wilderness War

Designed by Volko Ruhnke

Published by [GMT Games](#)

Two-player boxed boardgame; \$49.95



For seven long and difficult years, two giants stood toe to toe in a struggle for dominance of the North American continent in a series of conflicts known as the French and Indian War, or the Seven Year's war. Although this war was an extension of European wars between the French and the British, this particular conflict was ignited by the desire of both nations to wrest control of North America from the hands of the other. As the two nations struggled for power, the allied tribes of the Algonquin and Iroquois were caught in the middle of these powerful forces and were forced to choose sides. One of the important results of this war was that it prepared many Americans (like George Washington) for the fighting which was to come during the American Revolution.

Wilderness War is a two-player boardgame, based on this historical conflict. By combining historical events and leaders, Indian raiding, stockade building, and militias, designer Volko Ruhnke and GMT games provide a game with plenty of accurate historical flavor.

The game follows the card-driven format that was first made popular in games like *We the People* and followed in others such as *Paths of Glory*. Each card can be played as a historical event, or the numerical value can be used to activate leaders or forces (including construction of stockades or forts). An example of an event card would be the "Smallpox" Card that allows one to reduce the number of troops, especially Indian allies congregated in a single space. Some cards are combat-oriented and can be used to grant an advantage in battles. The cards are beautiful to behold and extremely well-balanced. The difficulty for the player is deciding whether the card should be played as the event, to activate a leader and his forces, or to build stockades, and so on. The result of this quandary means that no two games of *Wilderness War* are ever exactly alike. In fact, after a multitude of games, I have yet to see two games that played similarly. The card play keeps the game flowing and the other player guessing what you will do next. It also creates limitations that are both beneficial to game balance while at times adding frustration to the military commander.

Wilderness War is a complex game that is fairly simple to learn. This means that it is satisfying to both the veteran and the beginning wargamer. While players who expect something as complex as *Paths of Glory* may be disappointed, the game offers complexity without being daunting to the beginning wargamer. Even the "advanced rules" which primarily deal with such items as supply lines, avoiding battle, and interception of enemy troops are not very difficult to comprehend. This is not your typical "takes-a-military-genius-to-understand" wargame. My opponents and I have used the advanced rules for all of our games with no added measure of difficulty.

The sixteen-page rulebook is extremely well-written and easy to navigate using the large, bold-faced headings. In fact, there is only one complaint: despite the simplicity of the rules and game mechanics, even the veteran player must occasionally go on a quest for a specific rule. Most of the time the table of contents is sufficient to assist the player in locating the rule or explanation he is seeking, but a simple alphabetical index would do a great deal to make those rules even easier to locate.

There are two basic unit types in the game: Drilled troops and Auxiliaries. Drilled troops are the Regulars, Marines, Provincial regiments, Light Infantries, and Militias. These all represent the normal military troops active in the era. Auxiliaries include Indians and the frontier woodsmen of the day, British Rangers and French Coureurs des bois --

"Runners of the Woods." Units may freely stack together and participate in battles, etc. One prohibition is that only auxiliary units may raid.

As in the conflict that this game is based on, Stockades play an important part in this game. It takes a great deal of strategy to get drilled troops in a location where they can actually do combat, because drilled troops cannot retreat into wilderness spaces. After losing a battle, troops must retreat into the space from which they entered. If this space is a wilderness space with no friendly stockade then the troops are eliminated. In order to prevent such losses, players must erect stockades in wilderness and mountain spaces. Players may also opt to destroy any or all stockades they wish on their action phase in order to prevent such stockades from falling into the hands of enemy forces. Captured stockades provide victory points. Stockades also provide a way through mountain regions. Any units (yes, even including Indians) that enter mountain regions must immediately stop, unless there is a friendly stockade in that hex. Players will be forced to build stockades that they will have to destroy on later turns.

Combat resolution is straightforward and uncomplicated. Both sides roll a six-sided die and refer to a chart based on their combat strength, adding applicable positive or negative modifiers to the die roll. The chart indicates the number of step losses suffered by the enemy forces. Any natural die roll of 1 or 6 (except those that result in No Effect) causes the opposing leader to roll the six-sided die for each of his leaders involved in the battle; a roll of a "1" will kill that leader. Losers must retreat.

Players must earn the aforementioned victory points in order to win the game. Victory points are earned by raiding, winning a Battle against a stack of regular troops with more than four units, Capturing enemy forts, fortresses, or stockades, or capturing various strategic locations (Ohio Forks and Niagra).

Historically, the French urged their Indian allies to commit acts of barbarism in order to strike terror into the hearts of British Colonists; in *Wilderness War* it is good strategy for both sides to send their Indian allies out raiding. This is especially true for the French side, as there are times when they seem to have an endless supply of Indian allies. Those units just keep coming back due to the cards which allow them to be placed on the board. Even the British player will achieve half a victory point (rounded up) for each successful raid his Indians or Rangers conduct. Counters showing raided areas are placed on the board and counted at the end of the year. Of course, such raids often end in failure; normally, the odds against a raid being pulled off successfully are less than 50 percent. The success of a raid is determined by a six-sided die roll with certain positive and negative modifiers. An example of a positive modifier would be a general with a good tactics rating who accompanied his Indian brothers on a raid. A negative modifier would be granted if there were more than one militia unit in the department the raid is conducted within. An important limitation is built into the Indians raiding. Once Indian Units have attempted a raid, whether it succeeds or not, surviving raiders are returned to their home settlement. This prevents these types of forces from raiding too deeply into enemy territory.

In the real world, British General William Johnson seemed to have had a special understanding of his Indian allies. When General Braddock chose Johnson to lead the expedition against Crown Point he raised an army of about three thousand volunteers from New York and New England, plus about five hundred Mohawk allies. To reflect this within the game, *Wilderness War* allows this leader to command any number of Mohawk or Iroquois Indians without counting these forces against his command rating (which normally determines the number of troops that can be under his command). This simple mechanic continues to reflect the designer's effort at creating a game that accurately reflects the historical period.

As the game progresses, it is very likely that the French's ability to raid more frequently will increase. At the same time, the British troop strength will also grow as the game continues. A wise British player will try to stall most straightforward battles until later in the game as his reinforcements grow.

In all, *Wilderness War* does a remarkable job of giving each player a home-cooked meal of historically accurate flavor and an adequate helping of satisfying action for each side.

--David Wilson

Pyramid Review

Enter the Viking (for Rune RPG)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Chris Aylott, Rolfe Bergström, Dave Blewer, Tom Janulewicz, Michelle A. Brown Nephew, Philip Reed & Scott Reeves

Illustrated by Scott Reeves & Human Head Studios

80-page perfect-bound softback; \$16.95

If there is a problem to *Rune*, Robin D. Laws' reductive RPG of Viking hewing, thewing, and pillaging, it lies in the game's scenario design. Not so much in the conceptualizing of ideas, but rather than in the arithmetic necessary to balance the points spent in designing and building encounters. This is multiplied when you consider that *Rune* is not meant to be run by just the one GM, but rather, each of the players take their turn in running an encounter. Thus each player needs to learn the rules to running *Rune* and also the whole encounter design sequence as well . . . Until such times as all of a campaign's players can master both, Atlas Games have provided us with no small relief in the form of *Enter the Viking*, an anthology of encounters that can slipped into Rune campaigns as and when they are needed.

There are a total of ten encounters of the Cushion type to be found within Enter the Viking, plus a complete Plot Sequence. Cushion encounters are run by the other players in between the main encounters of a Plot Sequence, although the events of any Cushion encounter is quite unconnected to the plot of the runner's Plot Sequence. Half of those in this anthology take place in the Underworld, while the rest take place in the Underworld and somewhere else, such as Svartalheim or Scandinavia; the last two take place solely outside of the Underworld. It should be noted that two of the ten encounters are not new; "Goblin Goodies Galore" previously appeared in issue #19 of *Game Trade Magazine*, and "A Test of Viking Virtue" appeared in issue #9/10 of *Games Unplugged* magazine. In fact, both of these encounters can currently be downloaded from the Atlas Games website.

[SPOILER ALERT]

The book opens with Michelle A. Brown Nephew's aforementioned "Goblin Goodies Galore." The horde of Pillagers (*Rune*'s term for the player characters) are exploring the Underworld when they are ambushed by some Goblins just as they have to leap across a ravine. This is a simple two-event encounter that is written with neophyte Rune Runner (as the GM is known) in mind. There is a little useful commentary added to explain the process of the game, which potential runners should find informative after they have played it. Of course, this being *Rune*, they are quite entitled to view the current runner's notes . . .

Rune fans will know Chris Aylott as the author of the game's first adventure release *Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer*. His first contribution to this collection is "Iron Goblin," in which the Pillagers find themselves helping out a pair of vegetarian Goblins on the run from Goblin Slavers. Not only will the Pillagers have to deal with the Slavers, but also a giant mechanical centipede! In return for all of this effort, the Pillagers can gain possession of an interesting magical item that might also help their escape at the end of the encounter.

Michelle A. Brown Nephew also pens "A Test of Viking Virtue." This is a fairly simple series of events that take place in an Underground holy site, where the Pillagers will find the gods Odin, Thor, and Tyr judging their bravery, their fighting ability, and finally their bardic voice. The latter should be amusing to run, as the winning Pillager must read aloud from The Epic of Beowulf -- preferably in Old English!

"Getting Your Goat" is Chris Aylott's second encounter in *Enter the Viking*, and as the title suggests, it really should get the Pillagers' goat as they literally find themselves each transformed into one of the ornery little beasts . . . It gets worse when they are sold to end up in a Troll's stew, but a little lateral thinking and some acrobatics should see the Pillagers free again.

Tom Janulewicz's "Chalice in Underland" sets the Pillagers off in search of the fabled Flagon of the Aesir, facing Dwarf guards and their fiendish traps along the way. Should they be able to find the treasure, they can return it to their village where its connection to Odin will stand their home in good stead when Ragnarok comes . . .

In "Forests of Fury," Dave Blewer takes *Rune* out of the Underworld and into the dark woods of Svartalheim where they must rescue a captured Elven prince. "As the Wyrms Turn" also takes Rune out of the Underworld, but this time to the aid of a Scandinavian village beset by raiding Goblins. Chris Aylott also contributes to this encounter by Philip Reed, which introduces to *Rune* the Great Volcano Wyrms the Pillagers must dispatch before they can return to the Underground.

Outside of gaining glory and treasure, a Pillager's greatest motivation must be good victuals and even better drink. Rolfe Bergström's "Drunken Chieftain" plays upon this when a burning funeral barge returns from the sea to torch the twin towns of Filskfurt and Glenskirping. Both are renowned as the source of the best honey mead in all of Scandinavia and if they were lost it would surely be a blight upon the feasting hall of every village!

"The Seventh Seal" is Chris Aylott's fourth addition to this collection, and as the title suggests, it plays upon Ingmar Bergman film of the same name. Yes, it does have the Pillagers being challenged to a game of chess with Death, but not before they have to ski off the edge of a cliff . . . This encounter also ends with a face off against "The Seventh Seal," which is a very, very bad gag upon the author's part . . .

The last encounter in *Enter the Viking* is "The Remorse of Honir" by Scott Reeves, who is better known for artistic contributions to Atlas Games' books. More than the previous nine entries this is based around Norse myth, specifically dealing with the relationship between the Aesir and the Vanir. When the war between the two came to an end, hostages were exchanged, with the Aesir sending their fairest -- though not brightest -- as their offering to the Vanir. Although accompanied by Mimir, one of Odin's advisors, the Vanir soon discovered Honir's decided lack of wits and enraged returned Honir to Valhalla along with Mimir's head! It is the grieving god Honir that the Pillagers encounter and in between his sobs he begs them to return Mimir's head to his body on the Fount of Wisdom . . . Of course, no good Viking would ever turn down the request of a god, even one as foolish as Honir!

The last entry in the book is "Monastery on Fire," also by Chris Aylott. This, however, is not a single encounter of the Cushion type as before, but is rather a complete Plot Sequence, comprised of a Set-Up Encounter, a Development Encounter, and a Climax Encounter. Further it takes place in Foreign Lands, specifically those of the Franks, which really means that none of the previous ten Cushion Encounters can easily be run between the three that make up Monastery on Fire. This begins, quite literally *in medias res* with our Pillagers running away from the Frankish horde who are somewhat peeved that their monastery has just been raided. With the enemy at their rear and treasure in their hands, the Pillagers rush for the only cover available -- a bog full of frogs with teeth and many Loup-Garou, a terrible combination of man and wolf, that prey upon those that leave the path! Of course, there might be things to gain if they do, but there is the Frog God and more Franks in their way before they can get back to the beach and the ships home . . .

[END SPOILER ALERT]

It should be noted that these Cushion Encounters conform to the new points total to be spent on design -- 350 as opposed to the 300 points given on page 177 of the *Rune* rulebook. Runners more used to the lesser amount can find conversions for several of the encounters in "Enter the Viking" for the lesser budget. Throughout the anthology there are lots of terrible titles for both encounters and their events, which will make the reader and runner groan at their inclusion. Favorites include "Chalice in Underland" and "We Goat To Get Out Of This Place" in "Getting Your Goat."

Enter the Viking is not without very minor printing problems, but these will not really affect the usefulness of the

anthology. Although the book might be seen as slightly expensive, this really should not belie its usefulness to any group that wants to run a **Rune** campaign. All it needs now is a campaign companion, into which can be slipped a few -- if not all -- of these Cushion Encounters.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Villains (for d20)

Published by [Bastion Press](#)

Edited by Aaron Rosenberg and Wil Upchurch

Illustrated by Giner Kubic and Todd Morasch

96 full-color pages; \$24.95

Sometimes one of the hardest duties a Game Master has is coming up with viable opposition for a player. Of course, there are numerous books chocked full of new monsters to aid GMs in coming up with new and horrible ways to kill players, but most often, it's not some random orc or even some unheard of monster that truly matches the players not only in terms of power but wits. Instead, it's a good old non-player character that's taken a wrong turn somewhere.

d20 fans already have *Dramatis Personae: Campaign Ready NPCs* that includes good and evil characters, and Wizards of the Coast has released *Enemies and Allies*, another book chock full of helpful patrons and deadly adversaries. What, then, can Bastion Press add to the pot? Is this a book like the *Complete Book of Villains* that gave the GM tools to help design long term enemies, or just a monster book with a NPC twist?

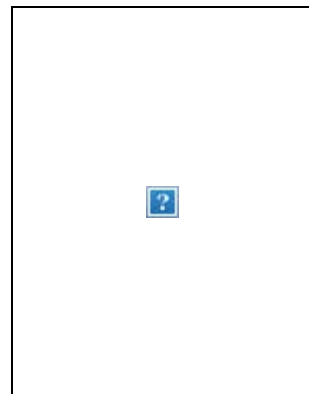
It's more of the latter than the former. The book boasts over twenty NPCs with a wide range of challenge ratings. There is no specific information on designing your own villains, but there are crunchy bits that *Villains* provides the patient reader.

One of the nice things is that the introduction provides the GM with the methodology used to create the characters. In this case, it's a point build with 28 points. A brief section on how to read the entries provides the GM with information on what is contained under which section. Most of it is pretty self-explanatory. For example, under Abilities, standard stats are listed. Under combat statistics, the fighting abilities such as hit points, hit dice, base attack bonus, and other important combat information is listed. Under skills, feats, spells, special attacks and qualities, you can find the self-titled information. Under appearance, history, and personality/goals, you can find non-game related information that enables the GM to use these villains for any game system, while lair/tactics, campaign use, and minions provide the *d20* GM with more game information. How do you use these characters at various levels? What type of fiend serves some of these despicable characters?

[SPOILER ALERT]

The mix of characters doesn't rely (at least not completely!) on old stereotypes. There are no evil male barbarians or Vikings out to rule the world. There is however, an outcast dwarf, Khorgus Gruebear, that hates caves and the whole of dwarf society, preferring to live among the dinosaurs. Not different enough for you? How about Syzzinar, "The Low Lord," a kobold lich who works on building various types of golems? Need something more devastating? How about Lukorazyll, "The Dire Reaper," a near-avatar of a god of destruction. This Thodol (a race of outsiders first introduced in the monster book *Minions: Fearsome Foes* by Bastion) would make a perfect servant for Vangal of the Scarred Lands setting.

There are more subtle threats, though. Alystin Azmyrial, the Queen of Beauty (or the Emerald Viper as she's sometimes called) rules over Sunset City with an unearthly beauty, while Pete Dunbar rules over the streets with a charm not quite so supernatural but perhaps more roguish. Those running a water-based campaign have Rapheel Tanelon, The Seawraith, a cleric with a new prestige class, sea reaver. On an undead boat of special construction,



Rapheel serves a death god by clearing the seas and always augmenting his undead ship. Those looking for more traditional fare on the seas can battle the Xyryth, a fiendish dire shark. That is assuming they survive an encounter with its children, the Spawn of the Xyryth, massive sharks that clock in at a CR of 11.

For those looking for more dangerous fare, the Skinrazer is a half-green dragon, half-udamentaz (a demonic outsider). This creature hunts down people for its master, an ancient thing from outside the standard dimensions and time frame that feeds on death, but feeds more from that death if the being suffers pain and terror first. The creature gains its name from its weapon, the razor of flensing. Worse still, it can create skin wraiths, undead made from the skin of those flayed. If it gets any worse, he can create an elite six man (unman?) unit of these creatures, the slaves of the skinrazer.

Sometimes though, the party just needs a powerful, cosmic entity to battle. In such instances, Zuratorkul -- also known as The Frozen Lord or the Lord of the Rift of Frozen Souls -- might be the ticket. This monster is listed as a CR of 25 and looks to be worth every point. Of course, lower-level characters wouldn't have a prayer of beating him, but perhaps they could start off with some of his servants. Even so, they'd have to be high-level before dealing with Jezylnyth, a female half-orc fighter (9th)/wizard (10th) that's served Zuratorkul for years.

There are other villains that can fill important roles in the GMs campaign and a careful reading of the book will show that if there's a specific need, like a female leader of a group of barbarians that fights against men and the male rule of most north societies, it's in here.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Early in the review I mentioned that patient GMs will find tools helping them make their own villains. That starts in the appendixes. The first one has a new user for the heal skill. Here, the skill enables the user to inflict pain through torture via their intimate knowledge of the human body. Appendix two includes new spells, both arcane and divine. Appendix three includes new magic items, including the Book of Eternal Necromancy, a minor artifact similar to a Book of Infinite Spells, but much more powerful. Thankfully, the method to create the non-unique magic items, like the boots of the raptor and beholder rod, among others, are provided along with a minimum caster level, and market price.

For those who can never have enough prestige classes, appendix four introduces the bloodtracker, dinosaur cultist, gutter stalker, and sea reaver. These are all ten full levels. The bloodtracker is a dangerous hunter, more capable than a bounty hunter perhaps in that she can establish ties to her victim via blood. The dinosaur cultist is a strange PrC suited for druids and other naturalist characters in that the character gains dinosaur-like powers if it can survive being swallowed whole by such a beast! The gutter stalker is a barbarian-based class with a twist in that it's suited for survival in the sewers among the rats. The sea reaver is not merely a pirate, but a dangerous fiend of the high seas who spreads pain and suffering

Appendix five introduces the ahazu, an evil outsider that specializes in burrowing. This monster is a powerful creature perfect for siege attacks. Appendix six arranges the villains by challenge rating and then alphabetizes them for easy of use. Unfortunately, they seem to have forgotten the page number, making this less than a truly useful listing. Main villains are in bold face type to showcase them from servants and minions. The lowest villain is Rufus Laruel, a young, 1st level rogue, while the highest is the demon lord Zuratorkul at a CR of 25, followed closely by Lukorazyll at 23.

The cover is set up to resemble the old core books in that it has the ancient book style look to it. The coloring is a little off to my eyes though, and the horned face in the center of the cover doesn't really grab me. The internal art is very good and easily captures what the villains in the book are supposed to look like, enabling the GM to come up with her own description if the one in the book fails her. Layout is standard in that its two columns, and text density is fair with hardly any margins on the top, bottom, or inner sides. The only bad part of the layout is the page numbering is red against a copper place-holder; this doesn't work out very well, making the page number hard to see.

For those who want to know if Bastion has continued to allow all their text to be Open Game Content, they can rest at ease. The whole text of the book is. In a time where product identity from some companies runs rampant, Bastion continues to be a breath of fresh air. As a side note, Bastion is already using their OGC, as several items from this book hail from their monster book *Minions*.

Those who will get the most out of this book are those who are looking for more long-term and short-term menaces for their campaign. While I would've liked an appendix on designing an effective villain, that would've cut out at least a character or two. The full color art work makes the product worth the price, even though it makes it one of the most expensive character collections on the market; in comparison, *Enemies and Allies* from WoTC costs \$14.95 for 64 b&w pages, and Archangel Studios' *Dramatis Personae* runs \$12.95 for 40 pages.

Show your players that no standard monster will be their bane. Show them that terror lurks not only in the frosty snows and the terrible seas, but in the heart of every man, woman, and undead lich kobold they encounter!

--*Joe G. Kushner*

Ghosts From The Machine

"Marcellus: Peace, break thee off! Look, where it comes again!

Bernardo: In the same figure, like the king that's dead.

Marcellus: Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.

Bernardo: Looks it not like the King? Mark it, Horatio.

Horatio: Most like; it harrows me with fear and wonder."

-- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I:i:48-53

The Ghost in *Hamlet* begins the play, and it begins our latest enigma, one not unlike the ghost himself. Where do artifice and apparition meet, if not in the realm of spirits -- and the realm of the stage? On the surface, this is a story of purloined invention, optical wonder, and a dead medium for bringing the dead to seeming life. But perhaps that's just the barker's patter. Backstage and behind the curtain of the Victorian demimonde, does the Spectre Drama actually play out between the realms of the dead, with the living only spectators and stagehands? Settle back in your seats, and watch as the ghosts appear.

"Henry Dircks, inventor of the Dircksian Phantasmagoria, an optical effect, meets showman Joseph Pepper, swamps the barn with lantern spooks in an ethereal mob.

Pepper's ghost depending only on a lamp, a sheet of angled glass, will nightly conjure wraiths accompanying performances of Hamlet. Couples hug each other in the hush, entranced by men of light in a refracted afterlife. Reality becomes imagined death in an unsilvered mirror. All the boundaries begin to slide, even the human body is unfixed."

-- Alan Moore, *The Highbury Working*, "Pepper's Ghost"

The drama begins with Henry Dircks, an engineer, author, and inventor of Dircks' Phantasmagoria, a mechanism for projecting ghostly images onto a stage. Dircks, according to his later memoir, had been inspired to design a superior "spectral apparatus" by early performances of *Hamlet*, in which he found the "language and unearthly eloquence of the spectre" far more wonderful than the "well got up, blood and life" actor who assayed the part. Dircks' original design was far too cumbersome for any but special-built theaters, however; the Phantasmagoria languished until Dircks entered into partnership with "Professor" John Henry Pepper, the director of the Royal Polytechnic Institution.

Throughout 1861 and 1862, Pepper and Dircks worked to perfect and miniaturize the Phantasmagoria, putting on occasional melodramas at local theaters or in the Polytechnic's audience-halls, and displaying vignettes from *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and other spectral fare. On Christmas Eve, 1862, the new Phantasmagoria projected spirits on stage in Charles Dickens' *The Haunted Man*, in which, according to an enthralled audience member, "The apparitions not only moved about the stage, looking as tangible as the actors who passed through them, and from whose proffered embrace or threatened attack they vanished in an instant, but spoke or sang with voices of unmistakable reality." On February 5, 1863, Dircks and Pepper patented "A Stage Phantom," and the Ghost walked on stage, just in time for Shakespeare's tricentennial the following year and a riot of phantasmic performances.

"Our natural magic makes no pretension to occult science, but on the contrary tends to dissipate many vulgar errors, by disabusing the public mind, even on matters long considered supernatural."

-- Henry Dircks, *The Ghost!* (1863)

Essentially, the Phantasmagoria was a flat sheet of "patent glass" at a 45-degree angle between the stage and audience. Below stage, a spotlight shines on the actor; the glass bounces his reflection visibly onto the stage while remaining completely transparent to the audience. This simple device, also called the "optical combiner", is still used today, most famously in the Haunted Mansion ride at Walt Disney World. The same effect manifests in modern heads-up displays in fighter aircraft and upscale automobiles. Variations on the effect had appeared in Lonsdale's Spectrographia of 1802, in an 1804 exhibit of "Optical eidothaumata" and "Capnophoric Phantoms" at the London Lyceum, the German conjurer Moritz' 1807 Phantasmagoria (which also displayed the ghost from *Hamlet*), a "gratifying show of spectres" at the Royal Mechanical and Optical Exhibition of 1812, and De Berar's Optikali Ilusio of 1833, which depicted Death on a pale horse. The general optical principle, and a phantasmagoria very similar to Dircks', appears in the 1558 *Magica Naturalis*, by the Neapolitan magician, artificer, and playwright Giambattista della Porta, of whose primitive

steam engines Dircks had also made a study.

"Every effort has been industriously made to mystify my having any part or lot in my invention . . . But by whom I never learnt, nor can I succeed in interesting others in a search after the offender or offenders. How, why, or wherefore done, I have been unable to fathom."

-- Henry Dircks, *The Ghost!* (1863)

However, all previous phantasmagorists from della Porta to Dircks had not succeeded in making the making of ghosts reliable and steadily profitable; that was the genius of John Henry Pepper. Soon, "Professor Pepper's adaptation of Mr. Dircks' living spectres, recently patronised by Royalty" (as the advertisements first stated) became "Pepper's Ghosts" (which is how they are known today to professional magicians and illusionists). Dircks claimed that a mysterious conspiracy was working to remove his name from the invention, and to throw his rights to spectral projection into shadow. Pepper and Dircks fought a brief public row over the rights to the Phantasmagoria, which ended by default with Dircks' death in 1873. Pepper's Ghosts remained a reliable draw until the coming of the kinescope finally out-spectered them in the late 1890s.

*"One need not be a chamber to be haunted,
One need not be a house;
The brain has corridors surpassing
Material place.*

*Far safer, of a midnight meeting
External ghost,
Than an interior confronting
That whiter host."*

-- Emily Dickinson (1863)

In the bitter Victorian rivalry of two men over the means of ghost-production, you already have plentiful material for **GURPS Steampunk** drama and delight. But let's dive deeper, below the scrim of optics and into some spectral speculation. The early 1860s were great years for ghosts; Queen Victoria entered permanent mourning in 1861 upon the death of Prince Albert, sending her entire realm onto a more morbid track. The spiritualists Andrew Jackson Davis and Daniel Dunglas Home toured the capitals of Europe. William Mumler invented "[spirit photography](#)" in 1861; ghosts already drawn to the Atlantic world by Victorian mania or the slaughters of the Civil War now had a new life on photographic plates. The greatest ghost-story writer in the English language, M.R. James, was born in 1862, the year Dircks and Pepper perfected their system of mirrors, lenses, and flaps to reveal the Otherworld on the stage. Also in 1862, Charles Dickens founded the Ghost Club in London to investigate spiritual phenomena; later members included physicist-ghosthunter [Sir William Crookes](#), Golden Dawn poet William Butler Yeats, and psychic archaeologist Frederick Bligh Bond. Most intriguingly, in 1862 the poet Emily Dickinson had a sudden rush of creativity, writing 366 poems without revision, as if impelled by an onrush of automatic writing, or dictation from the spirit world. After that year, she increasingly became a reclusive "Woman in White," never leaving her house in Amherst -- perhaps trapped by the spiritual energies she had channeled. Her literary executor published her poems for "the poor ghosts left behind." The "poor ghosts" may have transformed Dickinson in more ways than the literary -- in 1862, she first met the writer Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who described her as a kind of psychic vampire, who "drained my nerve power so much" that although he admired her morbid verse, he was "glad not to live near her."

*"At the essential landscape stare, stare
Till your eyes foist a vision dazzling on the wind:
Whatever lost ghosts flare,
Damned, howling in their shrouds across the moor
Rave on the leash of the starving mind
Which peoples the bare room, the blank, untenanted air."*

-- Sylvia Plath, "November Graveyard" (1958)

Did Dircks' earlier experiments and researches into perpetual motion open the sluices to ectoplasmic energies roiling in

the [Kirlian](#) ether, unwittingly spraying them through Mumler's lenses and animating Dickinson's pale, nervous (spirit) hands? Did Dircks' "combination of lenses and reflectors" grab energies that he knew nothing of? Or did he do the bidding of those on the Other Side, releasing spectral forces shaped by the occult dramaturgies of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*? John Dee, a contemporary and correspondent of della Porta, also designed stage machinery and experimented with lenses -- and neatly bracketing our Shakespearean spectres, Dircks was a deep student of the 17th-century alchemist and "Baconian intelligencer" Samuel Hartlib. From della Porta and Dee, through Bacon and Hartlib, does some ghostly thread run downstage to the opening doors of the nineteenth century, and Henry Dircks? But Dircks' thread crossed that of the Polytechnic "professor," and from here things get tangled. Did Dircks and Pepper develop a ghost trap, and disguise their genuine spectres as mere effects of light and shadow? Did the two struggle to exploit the spirits' Summerland in rival necromantic pocket imperialisms? Did Dircks bring his ghostly lineages to Pepper, only to see them betray him -- or stolen from him -- to jump from stage to the retinas of the mob and perhaps back onto the silver screen?

Perhaps Pepper was himself in league with other Forces, present within the "automaton [chess-player](#)" Ajeeb (the Polytechnic's other star exhibit), or leashed at the beck of the "defrocked clown" Edward Giovanelli, whose Alexandra Theatre in the notorious Highbury Barn showed Pepper's ghosts to audiences of rakes and thieves descended morally and genetically from the ones who came to Highbury in the palmy days of the Hell-Fire Club. Witnesses compared Pepper's Ghosts to the sudden apparition of [Spring-Heeled Jack](#), who likewise shares the rakehell spirit of mob violence illuminated in the Highbury Barn. Perhaps Jack served somehow as the ghosts' harbinger and missionary, liberated from the Lyceum stable of optical eidothaumata in 1804 to become the Hammersmith Ghost later that year. His prankster spirit sowed rivalry and mystery between Dircks and Pepper, to break the patent glass and let the spectres roam all across the stage of London, and into the shadows and the spotlight. Make of this mulligatawney what you will -- just be sure to add a ghost of Pepper.

The Lonely Mariner

An Adventure For *GURPS Swashbucklers*

by Matt Penn

Introduction

This adventure is a light-hearted romp aimed at pirate or swashbuckling campaigns. Tailor the names and places to suit your own individual game world. This adventure is best played after the characters have been campaigning at sea for some time, and are ready to throw away their hard-earned booty in a riotous debauched fashion, in true pirate style. The adventure should be played in a port that offers a haven to the brethren of the sea. In a historical campaign, this might be Tortuga or Port Royal, the "wickedest city in the world." Paint a picture of a tumultuous, thriving town, full of brothels, gambling dens, and drinking taverns, where Spanish gold is exchanged for simple pleasures and where life is lived for the moment, as it is often violently short and cruel. The plot is simple and depends entirely upon roleplaying; it may well not be suitable for all gaming groups. A chance meeting with a lovestruck sailor offers the swashbucklers a chance to aid a fellow seaman in the pursuit of a beautiful young woman born to another social class and hence a whole world away.

End of a Voyage

The PCs have disembarked from their ship, after the booty has been divided according to the articles, and are making their way expectantly into the port. Although it is midmorning, already the prostitutes are calling out to them, displaying their wares provocatively from windows. A small market in the town piazza is thriving, where exotic luxuries, stolen from their rightful owners, may be bought for a tenth of the European price. Drunken sailors stumble around, flagons in hand. One or two bodies lie unmoving in the building heat of the day, casualties from the previous night's mayhem. The PCs may wish to attend to their own agendas first, after having been at sea for so long, so have a non-player shipmate suggest they meet that evening for some well-earned entertainment in the Lonely Mariner, a tavern he heartily recommends.

The tavern is easy to find, either by asking around or stumbling across it in the small town. It is down a dirty, cobbled lane, and consists of a simple wooden building. The windows and doors are wide open in an attempt to allow the sea breeze to provide partial relief from the stifling tropical heat and humidity. The simple entrance leads into a dank, dark sweaty room, filled with all manner of desperados carousing at wooden tables, and a small central pit, in which vicious cock fights run continuously. The proprietor is Mme. Beauchamp, a carefully attired middle-aged woman. She seems to be a favorite with many of the patrons, and handles the crowd with skill and confidence, matching their coarseness and vulgarity with her own particular mirth and wit. The night's takings disappear within the many folds of her clothes.

Allow the PCs to indulge in all manner of vice. Mme. Beauchamp also runs a number of prostitutes, who will lead those willing to part with their gold for a few minutes of tenderness, upstairs to a row of small rooms of questionable hygiene.

Among the rogues present, three very different men stand out. A young, energetic gentleman will capture the sailors' attention. Dressed in light, baggy clothing, with his hair tied neatly back and a carefully trimmed beard, he seems very out of place . . . as does his companion, a lively African man with large golden rings dangling from his ears. Laughing uproariously, they hurl dice around a table, seeming not to care whether fortune is with them or against them. Their antics keep the whole table amused. Mme. Beauchamp serves them drinks herself, and they are obviously favored patrons. The PCs may join them in a furious gambling session, and if they play with a similar devil-may-care attitude, the gentleman will take a liking to them and invite them to carouse late into the night.

The gentleman is a gifted storyteller and revels in a good yarn, and often holds his audience in rapt attention as he narrates various exploits and adventures. He introduces himself simply as Marcel, and his companion as Henri. He cannot disguise his good upbringing, and the seamen will suspect he is indeed a man fallen from grace. Use Marcel and Henri to whip the PCs up into a frenzy of riotous behavior. As the night progresses, the stories and the wagers should become more outlandish and unbelievable. Only those skilled in carousing should be able to keep some modicum of decency.

The third man to capture their attention is an extremely good looking young sailor, sitting quietly on his own, staring down into the depths of his mug of industrial strength rum. He will probably only be noticed after the PCs have embraced the appropriate drunken roleplaying spirit. As his alcohol consumption increases, so does the depth of his obvious gloom and despair. Among the wild festive spirit displayed by every one else, he indeed stands out. The other sailors leave him to his misery; everyone has enough problems of their own, and this night is a chance to forget the evils of their world. The course of this adventure relies entirely on how the privateers approach this encounter. If they are so inclined to attempt to engage this young man in conversation and lift his spirits, they will be able to pry out of him the source of his melancholy. This will take careful roleplaying, good nature, and skill, as what is ailing this young man is hardly the stuff that stout seamen are publicly made of; initially, he is not that willing to divulge. More alcohol will loosen his tongue, but will also turn him into a blubbering mess. If they too ignore this young man, the gregarious Marcel will invite the moping sailor to join him for a drink or two, and loudly pry into the cause of his obvious unhappiness, creating another opportunity for the PCs to become involved.

Meeting The Lonely Mariner

Pierre Sange is a young sailor, who has just arrived from France, crewing on an English merchantship *The Resolute*. Pierre is very quick to emphasize how happy he was before this last voyage. Being literate and numerate -- which is most unusual for a sailor -- he was assigned additional duties several voyages ago, assisting the quartermaster with basic accounting and record-keeping duties. He thus enjoys being privy to the information about what cargo is really being carried, and what it is worth. Given his extra responsibilities, his pay is also significantly higher.

While on his most recent six-week voyage, he had the misfortune to fall head over heels in love with Mme. D'Oreton, the 18-year-old daughter of a wealthy plantation owner, returning home after spending two years in a prestigious finishing school for young ladies in France. He spent many idle hours casting longing glances at her fresh face, her golden ringlets of hair, and her easy grace. The only reaction he ever received from her during the entire voyage was a haughty command to stand aside while she passed through a bulkhead door. This alone shattered his illusions, making him realize the difference between their classes and the impossibility of him ever meeting her and winning her love. Hence his melancholy.

Upon hearing this woeful tale, it is hoped that the joyful, spirited (drunk) PCs will boastfully take on his cause, vowing to help Pierre win her heart. Those PCs who are more hardened and mercenary-minded might be tempted to help Pierre in his quest in return for information regarding cargo details and shipping schedules, thus setting the stage for a future adventure waylaying *The Resolute*. Pierre has fallen desperately in love and after only a few moments thought, will agree to provide cargo details in the future, providing no crew members are ever hurt, and the source of information is never revealed. (And, of course, GMs can always give Pierre access to campaign-specific items or secrets the pirates have been seeking; surely he would give them up, if only they would help him in this small task . . .) Allow the night to end after such a pledge or bargain has been made, with perhaps a good brawl or passing out in various awkward places.

"We Promised *What* Last Night?!?"

The following day, nursing hangovers and inexplicable bruises, the PCs should encounter their lonely friend, moping about the town. Remembering the previous night's encounter, they should be encouraged to begin plotting how a simple sailor can win this lady's heart. The following information can be ascertained.

From Pierre Sange

- Mme. D'Oreton is the most beautiful, graceful woman he has ever seen. (Every time Pierre is asked about Mme. D'Oreton you should allow your skill at awkward flowery, romantic poetry to blossom, until the PCs wisely learn not to question Pierre about his obsession.)
- A ball is to be held in honor of the three young women who returned from the finishing school. It heralds their "coming out" into society. Pierre overheard the girls chatting about it excitedly on the voyage.

From Townsfolk

- Mme. D'Oreton's father, M. Francis D'Oreton, is a mean, bad-tempered plantation owner with a reputation for harsh treatment of his slaves, even by the poor standards of the times.
- M. D'Oreton was exiled from France for political reasons. He longs to return.
- M. D'Oreton has become incredibly wealthy since arriving in the colony.
- He dotes upon his daughter, giving her everything she wants.

Romeo, Romeo . . .

Every attempt to get Pierre into talking range with Mme. D'Oreton will fail . . . and fail badly. In the town, she will always be accompanied by armed servants, who will take an intense dislike to any ill-bred scum who should leave the pirate quarter and come too close to their master's precious daughter. Attempts to woo her with poetry beneath her balcony or otherwise contact her on her father's property will be foiled, and result in the hounds being unleashed and the plantation foremen attempting to give the guilty party a good lashing with their whips.

The only hope will be for the heroes to secure an invitation for Pierre to the ball, where he can attempt to seduce the young beauty in an environment where she would never expect to meet a common sailor. It is not enough to simply obtain a ticket for Pierre. The heroes should realize that their luckless friend has few social skills, no sense of etiquette, and no suitable clothes. If they don't prepare him adequately for such a potentially vicious social engagement, Pierre will be humiliated beyond belief at the ball. The better they prepare Pierre, the more successful the whole enterprise is likely to be.

The Invitation

The PCs must reason who is most likely to be invited to a ball and how to lay their hands on a written invitation. Each invitation is individually addressed. In a colony full mostly of low-life scum, one could expect that the limited guest list would include the families of wealthy plantation owners, the officers in the local garrison, the captains of any naval vessels currently in port and important townsfolk and merchants. The simplest way to obtain a written invitation is to waylay a guest on his way to the ball and steal it. This is fraught with danger, as the ball is by invitation only, and if a particular person is missing, his friends will start asking questions . . .

Another potential is to forge an invitation, which means getting hold of an original, access to the guest list, and finding a suitable forger of master skill. This is a swashbuckling game of high adventure; such audacity should be well-rewarded. The guest list is in the hands of the town priest, Father Pedro, who cherishes organizing such social occasions. The priest also cherishes the governor's wife; if he is followed and observed, he may be caught committing cardinal sins with her, and may be blackmailed into adding an extra name or two to the list. Pierre can then pose as a wealthy merchant or whatever else he chooses to be (or the pirates suggest). A more intriguing way, perhaps, is to find out which of those individuals on the guest list might part with their invitation . . . willingly or unwillingly. If the sailors correctly deduce who might be invited, they may reason that most of the locals would be looking forward for months to the occasion, and that their best bet is to try the barracks or the docks.

Sniffing around, they can discover from off-duty soldiers that the captain of the garrison is leaving the day of the ball. He is a tough disciplinarian and will not be missed. His replacement is to arrive one day before the ball. There being a

shortage of eligible (appropriate) bachelors, the new captain already has an invitation waiting for him on his newly vacated desk; impersonating the new captain may spring to mind. This will involve abducting him and physically restraining him for the duration of the social event. The only other officer who will be present from the barracks is the Major. He is popular with the troops, as he is a hopeless alcoholic and very lax. He will not notice the switch for his new captain, as long as he is started early in the evening on some strong rum, and kept reasonably inebriated. The other possibility is that of a French naval captain on board a warship, which has arrived in the port. The naval captain is a surly individual, who is much more interested in spending the night in a brothel than at a high society function, and will willingly sell his ticket for 50 livre, or wager it gambling. Again, going as the naval captain has the advantage that no one really knows him.

The Making Of A Gentleman

- **Clothes.** The heroes may think of having a tailor run up a suitable set of ball clothes. There is one gentleman's tailor in the town. He will take an immediate dislike to those of very low social rank and may outright refuse to offer his services. A suitable threat or gift will suffice to change his cowardly-but-greedy mind. He will initially charge 10 livre. An extra bribe or threat will be needed to prevent the tailor from maliciously gossiping to his other customers about the "sailor pretending to be a gentleman." If this precaution is not taken, Pierre will be immediately recognized by his outfit upon arrival. (Kind GMs will give the heroes the opportunity to discover the gossip *before* the ball, and give chances to repair the damage . . .) If Pierre is impersonating the new garrison captain, the unfortunate waylaid man's uniform must be removed for use during the evening, adding insult to injury. If going as the naval captain, an appropriate outfit must be made.
- **Dancing.** At the ball, the guests won't be dancing a jig to the hornpipe. If the players think of this, they may remember Marcel. If Marcel was befriended, he is more than willing to teach Pierre more formal dancing. This could lead to some very embarrassing scenes . . . This will not grant the Dancing skill, but will allow a temporary default of DX-2. If taught to a player who already has Dancing as a skill, a few days of lessons allows Pierre to learn the basic steps of ballroom dancing, and hence use the player's own skill level.
- **Etiquette.** If asked, Marcel will also give a crash course in etiquette. Correct expressions, how to hold cutlery, how to talk to a young lady, etc. This will not grant the skill *Savoir-Faire*, but will allow a temporary default of IQ-1 rather than IQ-4 when interacting with others at the ball. ("Lesson one: Don't say *anything* unless you absolutely have to . . .")
- **Presents.** A suitable gift for the young lady may win her over. Quizzing one of her maids when she comes to town will reveal that the young lady loves a particular type of flower. If the PC flatters the maid and treats her well, this will be an honest answer. If the PC is vile and threatening, she will describe a flower her mistress is allergic to.
- **Woing.** Mme. Beauchamp has had her heart broken many times. She can provide invaluable advice on what a young woman would like to hear.

Of course, any of the above can instead be taught by characters with the appropriate background and skills. However the seamen get Pierre to the ball, his chances of success will depend entirely upon how well they have prepared him. Dressed in well-made clothes, he cuts quite a dashing figure. If everything was well-prepared and well executed he should succeed, and win the young lady's heart; Mme. D'Oreton will fall in love both Pierre's true self, *and* the lengths he went to in order to meet her. (Of course, this may have complications of its own . . .) If the heroes ill-prepared Pierre for his attempt, he will be the laughing stock of the night. Regardless, if the heroes don't attend the ball, this should be a tense evening until they hear from Pierre again; did their efforts work? And if not, will their role in the ruse be revealed?

Variations

You may chose to replace Pierre's role with that of a suitable PC who has fallen for the young lady. A Don Juan in the party may fall in love with Mme. D'Oreton as well, and become a direct rival for her affections, either openly or covertly subverting Pierre's attempts. If a PC attends the ball, you will need to recreate a social situation fraught with "danger" for the inexperienced. Holding cutlery the wrong way, crude language, verbal duels with vindictive socialites,

dancing with young ladies, building up the courage to talk to Mme. D'Oreton, etc. Allow your imagination to run riot and make the characters sweat!

Potential Consequences

- The swashbucklers may have made numerous enemies. The captain of the garrison, Father Pedro, M. D'Oreton, and so on. This may make things uncomfortable in the town.
- Vincent Paul (see below) may challenge a PC or Pierre to a duel to protect Mme. D'Oreton's "delicate mind" from the dangers of associating with low-lives, should Pierre's background be revealed. Vincent will not think twice about killing a pirate/sailor, but a PC should think carefully about the consequences of killing a gentleman.
- An angry, vicious M. D'Oreton will scour the town with his overseers, searching for those who embarrassed him in public.
- If Pierre should win Mme. D'Oreton's affections, he may well flee the port two weeks later, driven back to the sea to escape her constant whining and nagging.
- If the PCs make a genuine effort to aid Pierre in his quest, true to his word he will make the cargo inventory, sailing schedules, and route for *The Resolute* available, setting the scene for an efficient high seas robbery.

The Cast

All NPCs speak French as their primary language, except Henri, whose primary language is an African one.

Marcel

Marcel is a dashing 28-year-old son of a noble. Exiled from France for killing a powerful man in a duel, he no longer acknowledges his once-privileged social status. Nevertheless he is a good source for social skills. Impulsive, Marcel doesn't dwell upon consequences of his actions. He is literate, educated, and friendly.

ST 12, DX 15, IQ 12, HT 12

Speed: 6.75, Move: 6

Dodge: 6 Parry: 12

Advantages: Alcohol Tolerance; Charisma+2; Handsome; Literacy.

Disadvantages: Enemy (the family of the man killed in the duel), Impulsive.

Quirks: Polite. Fastidious about personal cleanliness. Refuses to acknowledge his noble birth. Loyal to Henri.

Skills: Black Powder Weapons-16; Carousing-15; Dancing-15; Fast-Draw (Rapier)-15; Fencing (Rapier)-18;

Gambling-12; Poetry-13; Riding-15; Savoir-Faire-15; Seamanship-15; Spanish-12.

Equipment: Well dressed in light, baggy clothes. Transitional rapier. 0.60 Flintlock pistol. Pouch with shot and powder.

Note: Marcel has renounced his noble birth, hence this does not currently count as an advantage.

Mme. Beauchamp

Mme. Beauchamp, the owner of the Lonely Mariner, is a beautiful, successful 42-year-old businesswoman. She is more than a match for any of the pirates; she has a finger in many pies at any given time. Literate and self-educated, she is a good source of knowledge on the isle and its colorful characters.

ST 7, DX 8, IQ 14, HT 10

Speed: 4.5, Move: 4

Dodge: 4

Advantages: Beautiful; Charisma+2; Literate; Wealth-Comfortable.

Disadvantages: Second Class Citizen (woman).

Quirks: Soft spot for charming rogues; distrusts Spanish; courageous.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Tortuga)-14; Black Powder Weapons- 10; Diplomacy-14; English-14; Fast-Talk-14; Gambling-14; Holdout-16; Merchant-16; Spanish-14; Streetwise-16.

Equipment: Concealed .50 Pocket Pistol. Total 100 livre hidden in various places on person.

Henri

Henri is 29-year-old escaped plantation slave who has taken a new French name. He is very intelligent, and was taught to read by Marcel. He has a deep hatred of slavery and plantation owners.

ST 14, DX 10, IQ 14, HT 12

Speed: 5.5, Move: 5

Dodge: 5 Parry: 8

Advantages: Literacy; Language Talent +3.

Disadvantages: Social Stigma (escaped plantation slave).

Quirks: Hates plantation owners. Loyal to Marcel. Raises good luck charm to forehead before risky ventures.

Skills: Brawling-12; Carousing-12; Cooking-14; English-14; French-19; Gambling-14; Knife-16, Knife-Throwing-16; Seamanship-15; Spanish-18.

Equipment: Light sailor's clothes, large knife, 3 small throwing knives, wooden African charm on necklace.

Father Pedro

Father Pedro is a 33-year-old French-Spanish priest born of a French father and a Spanish mother. He cannot control his passions for women, despite his vows. He is literate, highly educated, and very handsome.

ST 8, DX 10, IQ 10, HT 10

Speed: 5, Move: 5

Dodge: 5

Advantages: Attractive; Charisma+2; Clerical Investment; Literacy.

Disadvantages: Lecherousness.

Quirks: Identifies as a Frenchman. When preaching, delivers fiery sermons full of portents of doom for sinners.

Skills: Acting-12; Dancing-10; History-10; Latin-10; Literature-10; Riding-12; Savoir-Faire-12; Sex Appeal-12; Spanish-18; Theology-10.

Captain Fouchard

The 30-year-old Captain Fouchard is the new garrison captain. He is conscientious, upright, and a strict disciplinarian. He abstains from all vice. If he is temporarily abducted for the purposes of obtaining an invitation, he will become an implacable, determined foe.

ST 12, DX 12, IQ 10, HT 14

Speed: 6.5, Move: 6

Dodge: 6 Parry: 10

Advantages: Alertness+2; Literacy; Military Rank+3; Strong Will+3.

Disadvantages: Sense of Duty (King of France).

Quirks: Very serious, all the time. No sense of humor. Doesn't indulge in any forms of vice and expects his troops not to either. Strict disciplinarian. Unforgiving of others mistakes/offenses.

Skills: Black Powder Weapons-14; Brawling-12; Fast-Draw (rapier)-14; Fencing (rapier)-16; Intimidation-12; Interrogation-12; Knife-12; Leadership-12; Stealth-12; Tactics-12.

Maneuvers: Counterattack-12; Disarming-12; Feint-14; Lunge-16; Riposte-14.

Equipment: Military dress. Transitional rapier. Main-Gauche. .60 Flintlock Pistol. Telescope.

Mme. D'Oreton

Already a difficult, spoiled child, Mme. D'Oreton's years at the finishing school have taught her that social class matters. Treated as an inferior because she was born in the colonies, her school years were miserable. Now 18 years old, she intends to teach others that -- at least in this corner of the world -- she is their social better.

ST 8, DX 12, IQ 10, HT 12

Speed: 6, Move: 6

Dodge: 6

Advantages: Literacy; Status+1; Very Beautiful; Voice.

Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Bully; Jealousy; Second Class Citizen (woman); Stubbornness.

Quirks: Talks about herself incessantly. Loves performing songs in public.

Skills: Dancing-15; Riding-14; Savoir-Faire-14; Sex Appeal-16; Singing-16.

M. Francis D'Oreton

M. Francis D'Oreton is a 48-year-old bad-tempered, selfish plantation owner who was exiled for political reasons. Irritated by the tropical heat, he is always red and sweaty. He is notorious for the ill treatment of his slaves. If embarrassed in public, he will hound those responsible with the unreasoned passion he has for making others suffer.

ST 8, DX 8, IQ 11, HT 10

Speed: 4.5, Move: 6

Dodge: 4 Parry: 6

Advantages: Filthy rich; Literacy; Single Minded; Status+2.

Disadvantages: Cowardice; Enemy (political enemies in France); Fat; Reputation (cruelty to slaves).

Quirks: Greedy. Selfish. Thirsts for revenge upon those who cross him. Dotes on daughter.

Skills: Black Powder Weapons-10; Fencing (rapier)-9; Intimidation-12; Merchant-15; Riding-11; Spanish-13.

Equipment: Slashing Rapier. Flintlock .52 pistol. Flintlock .69 (custom made hunting firearm). Pouch with 200 livre. Flashy clothes.

Pierre Sange

Pierre Sange is a young French sailor. Very handsome. Although he is melancholic, dreamy, and absent-minded, he has accomplished much for only being 20 years old. He is literate and fluent in French and English, with a working knowledge of Spanish.

ST 10, DX 14, IQ 10, HT 12

Speed: 6.5, Move: 6

Dodge: 6 Parry: 7

Advantages: Handsome; Literacy.

Disadvantages: Wealth- Struggling.

Quirks: Romantic at heart. Daydreams.

Skills: Boating-14; Brawling-16; Climbing- 14; Cooking-10; English- 12; Knife-14; Seamanship-12; Spanish- 10; Streetwise-10.

Equipment: Sailor's clothes. Small knife. Gold earring.

Vincent Paul

Vincent Paul is a 26-year-old hotheaded duelist. The aggressive, arrogant son of a plantation owner, he can make a dangerous rival for Mme. D'Oreton's affections at the ball should the GM decide it needs further complications.

ST 12, DX 11, IQ 8, HT 11

Speed: 5.5, Move: 5

Dodge: 5

Advantages: Status+1.

Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Overconfidence.

Quirks: Dislikes non-French. Dislikes those of lower Social Status. Dislikes non-Catholics. Dislikes those who are more handsome than him. Dislikes strangers.

Skills: Black Powder Weapons-12; Dancing- 12; Fencing (saber)-13; Gambling-8; Intimidate-14; Riding-12.

Equipment: Well-dressed in gentleman's clothes. Saber. .52 Flintlock Pistol. .69 Musketoon (hunting weapon).

Coming Soon

The Power of Labels

QS THE BRG FIRP KLQU, THE LRVI YRT KHH JEBL KQJI HG THEF
LRGPU, HF JQUKRWIGOT KLQGW KLIFI QU YQUPHJ BHGKRQGIP
KLIFIQG. QS KLI ORKKIF, KLIQ YI RDHOHNQZI . . . IUDIBQROOT UQGBI
KLIFI RFI GHGUIGUQBRO DLFRUIU OQWI "BOHBWYQUI NEJPFHDU
LQKKQGN HG DHWIF" RGP "ULHI-SORVHFIP PIUKQGT." SQUL OHVI
CESST!

Hah! I kid my torch-wielding audience!

Anyway, I was talking with someone I met online a couple of weeks ago, and she asked me a question: "Has anyone ever told you your sense of humor was corny?"

This wasn't a judgmental statement, or any kind of criticism. And I told her, in all honesty, that I hadn't. See, I've always taken pride in myself for my sense of humor. Without trying to brag, I've been called funny, witty, crazy, droll, and ma'am. (The last mostly over the phone, where my higher-pitched voice, tendency to be unerringly polite, and a lack of bodily noises all combine to confuse some people as to my gender. Recently one phone company representative kept pressing the issue, asking for more and more verifying information before saying, "Well, it's just that Steven is usually a man's name." To which I replied, "Well, I'm usually a man." But I digress.)

But I've never been called "corny" before; corny is the province of *Archie* comics, Double Bubble gum wrappers and fifth-grade knock-knock jokes . . . not (I thought) the sort of thing I usually partake. And so the notion of this label has stuck with me for a while, and not merely because I seek an uncontroversial topic that will hopefully garner less toasty warm goodness than last week over on the [message boards](#).

So this notion got me to thinking about the power of labels, especially in their ability to give characters something they haven't thought of before. Depending on the character (and the player!), a label from an NPC may affect them. Consider the following:

- How would Captain Kirk react to being called "unattractive" by a comely alien woman?
- How would Superman react to being called a "racist" by a black civilian who happened to be rescued after a white one after a burning building? (As an aside, *Superman* #179 from a couple of months ago dealt with similar issues.)
- How would Darth Vader react to being called a "hero" by an admiring stormtrooper?

Now, the character may not care at all. He might think the labeling person is simply wrong. Or the label might deeply shake him. This is especially true if the character is iconic or otherwise solid in his self-identity. Being labeled as a "sexist, misogynistic dinosaur" is less likely to disturb a random guy on the street than someone who thinks of himself as the world's greatest superspy.

(As an aside, a label is a simple way to make a memorable NPC. Fate has a way of bringing back judgmental minor figures; that reporter who called the hero a coward because he seemed to run away before just *happens* to be at the site of another incident where appearing to retreat would otherwise be a very tempting possibility . . .)

Once I started thinking about one person labeling another, I considered how labels can "stick"; one person's opinion in the right place can stay to haunt (or help) a character for a long time. In the comics we have J. Jonah Jameson crafting headlines like "Spider-Man: Threat or Menace?", and in the real world we have incidents like the 1996 Olympic Park bombing in Atlanta, where Richard Jewell was presumed guilty by many before being exonerated by authorities.

What will a hero do when he encounters the tenth person who says, "Look! It's the Dark Defender! I hear he's a coward!" Like a high school rumor, any rigorous attempts to quell such rumors may only strengthen them ("Look at

(Editor's Note: As promised, the solution to last week's column is available online now.)

[The Answer](#)

(Good things are worth the wait . . . although my column probably isn't one of 'em.)

the new headline! 'Dark Defender Cowardly Assaults Defenseless Criminal'). And seemingly innocuous actions and words can be taken as "proof" by those unwilling to see . . .

Of course, it's not fair for a GM to use the [media](#) solely to harass a player for all time (unless he enjoys that sort of thing). But for a story arc or a subplot, it can be an interesting intangible challenge for heroes to face.

And don't forget that labels give as well as take away. For example, the X-Men were forged from the concept of a world that fears and hates them as mutants. What if a charismatic mutant does something spectacular (like saving a beloved figure who is publicly grateful), such that the world suddenly finds itself *adoring* mutants? Mutantmania might sweep the land, bringing a whole new set of problems to the group.

Or perhaps the gentle giant of the group is embraced as a Zen Master ("Of course he's brilliant! He doesn't *say* anything!"), and is sought by those looking for wisdom and enlightenment. How does the team's brick react to being thought of as brilliant? What does he do when that label dissipates? What if it never does?

Labels are flung around every day, and most of us have a fairly good idea of what sort of labels apply to us, and which don't. And sometimes a word can be a much more effective way to challenge heroes than a sword . . .

And I *still* say I don't have a corny sense of humor.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: The first *Knights of the Dinner Table* comic strip, from *Shadis* #2, and also reprinted in *Knights of the Dinner Table: Tales From The Vault Vol. 1*

(Four stars) "One afternnon, I prepared a session and told everyone to bring their 'bad guys'. When they showed up, I grabbed all the characters to *check their stats* . . . I looked up after a few minutes, seeing that my players were waiting patiently for their characters back. I smiled, handed them my Player's Handbook and told them to roll up new first level *good* characters."

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Plotting Like Old Man Jenkins

by Brian Rogers

We all know Old Man Jenkins; he's the disgruntled amusement park employee using the myth of the funhouse ghost to drive away crowds while he pursues his plans. Old Man Jenkins is the master of misdirection, scaring investigators out of their wits using nothing but the real world. You should try to be more like him now and then. Now, this doesn't mean you should include Old Man Jenkins in your campaign; your players are probably too postmodern . . . too savvy. They'll see it a mile away, and either get upset about your not being serious or start in with the jokes. Instead, you should *become* Old Man Jenkins -- channel his particular genius to keep your players on their toes.

Experienced players have a finely honed sense of what to expect, and that makes them quick to believe. Compared to most player characters, Fox Mulder is a garden-variety skeptic. After all, your players know that they're in a horror game, and dismissing the existence of monsters will result in their characters becoming interesting blood splatters -- not the mark they want to leave on the game world. This quick-to-believe attitude makes them difficult to surprise, but easy to mislead. Below are three Old-Man-Jenkins-approved plots to teach them that a skeptical approach isn't necessarily a resumé builder for a career as monster chow. (Note: The titles below work better if you add "Old Man Jenkins and . . ." in front of each. He's not unlike like [Indiana Jones](#) that way.)

The Curiously Changed Archaeologist

*(1920s to
Contemporary)*

The Hook: Olivia Cooper (nee Van Der Mar) -- a wealthy heiress who married below her station -- contacts the investigators (hopefully after their first case, when they're already aware of the existence of Things Man Was Not Meant To Know). Olivia is concerned for her husband, Ephram Cooper, archaeologist and professor at the local university. Since he returned from the Belize dig two months ago, he's been acting strange: snappish, distant, secretive, argumentative, getting strange phone calls and slipping into a language Olivia can't recognize. She's dreadfully worried for him ("What if something had happened? Down there, I mean?"), and wants the investigators' unofficial help.

The Line: The PC's investigation reveals:

1. The university is covering up the dig: hiding from the press, dodging investigators from Belize, talking about revoking Cooper's tenure for "the unpleasantness." This is all hush-hush, and difficult to pry out of a very nervous university.
2. More than half of the dig's work force is very ill, and several have died of an "unidentified fungal infection." Of these, only one was an university employee; the rest were all natives hired for the dig. The local, John Gustafson, died, and his family will not talk to the investigators. In fact, they seem terrified about any contact with them.
3. Dr. Cooper is incredibly paranoid, and constantly behaves as if he thinks he's being watched. He seems nervous, with explosions of verbal temper if confronted or threatened. He has flown to Belize twice since his return, without the knowledge of his wife (who thinks he's at conferences) or the University (who'd be livid if they knew).
4. Olivia Cooper is beautiful, precise, and formal. She is seldom at home, shuttling between her service organizations and social groups. Some of her friends acknowledge that her husband has been acting "most peculiar." She appears to be happy in her marriage, and is a devout Catholic. The Cooper's money is hers, a part of her inheritance.
5. Diligent investigators will spot Dr. Cooper speaking with two uncomfortable-looking men in ill-fitting suits, speaking a language that clearly isn't English or Spanish. These men will try even harder to avoid notice, and will leave town shortly thereafter. In a 1920s game, they also seem confused about many aspects of contemporary life.

Shortly after this meeting, Olivia is found (perhaps by the investigators) dead in her house. The police try to block any press access to the case. If the investigators see the body, it has been brutally beaten and cut up. Ephram is every inch the grieving husband, and the police declare that she was killed when she stumbled into a robbery in progress (some things were indeed missing, but not much, as the thief or thieves must have panicked). Shortly thereafter, Dr. Cooper leaves the University and country, quietly vanishing back into Belize.

The Sinker: To anyone who *doesn't* know they're in a Horror game, it's obvious that Dr. Cooper is having an affair; he met a Belize native and was drawn into a passionate relationship. This distraction led to his failure in health and safety precautions at the dig, infecting the work crew with a nasty fungus they unwittingly unearthed (reference the review of [Dangerous Places: Health Safety & Archaeology](#)). The university -- the dig's sponsor and thus liable for the damage -- is covering things up with the Belize government and threatening to cut off benefits to Gustafson's family if they discuss this with anyone. Once back home, Cooper decided to run off with his mistress, but divorcing his wife would deny him access to her fortune. Thus, he arranged for two thugs from Belize (The language they are speaking is Kekchi (see http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=2020), to murder Olivia under the guise of a robbery, so that he might inherit her fortune and live in comfort. And he'll get away with it too, if the investigators spend all of their time looking for Mi-Go Host bodies!

The Cursed Gold Mine

(Fantasy, Western)

The Hook: The heroes wander into Crescent Creek, a new gold mining boomtown. Maybe they're passing through, looking for work or aiming to try their luck, but they discover that much of the town is dead or dying. The common link? All of them worked in the Crescent Gold Mine. According to the Fanneley Brothers, the mine's owners, it's a curse by the local indigenes (be they Native Americans, Elves, or whatever the campaign supports) on the people of the town, trying to drive them away. Abstinence Borden, the preacher who is doubling as town doctor in the absence of an actual physician (or is just a lay brethren with limited spells in a world of clerical magic), asks for the heroes' assistance; perhaps their outsider viewpoint can find a way to get the curse lifted before either everyone dies from the sickness or in a raid by the indigenes.

The Line: Investigation reveals:

1. The Fanneley Brothers are the bosses of the town; their mine has the best veins and they control the sheriff & the general store. Most of the miners in town work for them, and they're ruthless in trying to keep mine production up.
2. The sickness does not respond to Abstinence's treatments, although he is admittedly not an expert. If magical disease cures are available, they are ineffective as well. The symptoms include muscle spasms, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, garlic odor on the breath, diarrhea, and dehydration.
3. The Fanneley Brother's claim on the land is a forgery, backed by their money and guns. The land legally falls on indigene land, but anyone who argues the point gets roughed up or eliminated.
4. According to the indigenes, the mine is on cursed land; they tell characters it's dangerous to dig there, but the curse isn't of their doing. Warnings about the land are seen as threats, to which the Fanneleys respond with violence. The indigenes have been responding in kind, escalating the situation.
5. Stories are reaching the camp that people handling the gold back in civilization are falling ill as well; the Fanneley Brothers are suppressing this information to keep the gold flowing. The people in the town are nervous and scared, and the Fanneleys focus that against the indigenes.
6. If confronted with the curse, the Fanneleys will capitulate and hire the heroes to go into the mines and kill or drive off the spirit responsible. The heroes won't find anything except an ambush (probably Fanneleys men dressed as indigenes) and an "unfortunate" cave in. There's definitely nothing magic or evil down there.

If the heroes can't defuse the situation quickly, the sickness spreads to people who don't even work in the mine. The Fanneleys whip the town into a raid on the natives, a blood bath on both sides. Even so, it won't cure the illness, and those working in the mine or even living in Crescent Creek will sicken and die.

The Sinker: The gold mine is not cursed, but it may as well be. The vein is laced with arsenic, a poisonous element often found near gold deposits. This mine doesn't just have trace amounts it has exceptionally high levels of arsenic that are poisoning not just those who work the mine, but anyone who handles the gold and eventually the town's groundwater, as the runoff from the mining process enters the water table. Since arsenic is a poison and not a disease, it is resisting magical disease cures, but will respond normally to magical poison cures. Any PC with effective knowledge of chemistry or medicine, or with a clear head and previous mining experience (things not really present in this sudden boomtown) have a good chance of making the arsenic connection.

Even with that information, there is no end to the situation other than closing down the mine and abandoning the gold. If the PCs can prove it's arsenic, they stand a good chance of accomplishing that without bloodshed. In a frontier environment, they may mete out some justice to the unscrupulous Fanneleys, who are sacrificing workers for their profits. It's possible for the PCs to never learn the real problem in this scenario: after all, the land was stolen from the natives, who are warning people about the curse. Kill the thieves, close the mine, return the land to its rightful owner and ride off into the sunset. Players trapped into looking for a magical cause and effect can drive themselves crazy in this situation, joining in the confusion already present.

The North Sea Triangle *(Pulp to Contemporary; probably best in Atomic Horror)*

The Hook: The *USS Morrison*, a ship carrying an important government agent and his unspecified black-box documents, has gone missing in the North Sea. It sent one radio message about the water looking, "Very disturbed, Very . . . Strange." Then nothing. No survivors have been found, no wreckage recovered. This makes the third such disappearance in that area in the last 20 years. Foul play is suspected, and the heroes obviously have to investigate and recover the documents -- or destroy them before they fall into enemy hands.

The Line: If the heroes do more research, they learn:

1. This has been going on for a lot longer than 20 years. There are stories linking Atlantis or Lyonesse to that area, there are old Viking tales about a part of the North Sea that eats ships, fisherman's tales about parts of the map where no wise skipper takes his crew.
2. Those looking for who's responsible will find a tale from a WWI pilot who swore he saw a German vessel slide directly under the waves, not changing orientation in the slightest, and stories of advanced German U-boat technology (perhaps now in the hands of the Russians) that would let subs drag ships down or swallow them whole.
3. Strange water appearance -- be it water distortion or reflections from overhead objects -- is common in waterborne UFO sightings, as are ships suddenly going missing for that matter! Whatever happened to the *Morrison* matches other such unexplained disappearances, perhaps a little too closely for comfort.
4. According to some conspiracy theorists, the black box papers on the *Morrison* detailed experiments that the Soviets (or others) were performing -- experiments similar to the [Unified Field Theory](#) work the US dabbled with in WWII! The heroes superiors will deny this, of course.

The Sinker: In this case, literally! The North Sea's shallow bed theoretically has layers of sediment containing trapped [methane deposits](#). Normally this diffuses slowly into the water, but some pockets are under impermeable sediment, released only when the sediment is penetrated or broken. When that happens, the methane surfaces in a rush, lowering the density of the water so much that boats overhead can no longer stay afloat. They sink like a stone, as do any lifeboats, passengers or wreckage, trapped in water that will no longer support them. When the heroes get to the bottom, they discover a veritable treasure trove of sunken vessels, just waiting for someone to recover them. Of course, things probably aren't that easy, and even with this scientific explanation, there are still enemy agents looking for the black box files from the boat, dangerous deep sea carnivores to contend with, and the almost inevitable sinking of their own boat.

In the real world, the odds of such a methane eruption sinking a ship are astronomically smaller than the scenario presented. Probability-conscious GMs might want to add some mad scientist setting off the methane pockets for his own insidious ends. Doing so removes Old Man Jenkins from the plot, unless you use the methane as a double-blind, surprising the characters with the mad scientist after getting them to believe that it is just a natural occurrence.

* * *

Notes

*I learned about the North Sea methane pockets from Simon Reeve in his 'Zine They Call Me Igor #5, appearing in Alarums and Excursions #311 (July 2001). You should be reading A&E regardless, but Mr. Reeve's contributions are chock full of clever adventure seeds, alternate realities and discussions about **GURPS** from a man who honestly loves the system.*

The poison gold mine does indeed exist, probably in more than one place, but definitely in my Connecticut home town. The gold is just sitting there, but the level of arsenic and cobalt contamination makes it so dangerous and cost prohibitive to remove that it isn't worth pulling out of the ground.

Joe's Oxygen Shack

by Matt Riggsby

Asteroid prospectors spend weeks, even months alone in their tiny vessels. But sooner or later they need to resupply. If they happen to strike something valuable, they also need to find someone to sell it to. And, of course, they have more human needs and desires: congenial companionship, a good meal, and air that doesn't smell like recycled prospector. When those needs must be met, most prospectors end up somewhere like Joe's Oxygen Shack, a combined bar, restaurant, general store, hotel, and mining company office. Anything a lonely, tired prospector could want, short of gravity, can be found at the Oxygen Shack.

Going to the Shack

The Shack is built into a small, mined-out asteroid, its tunnels and chambers providing ample space for the establishment to grow into. From the outside, the Shack is unspectacular. There's a field of solar panels providing main power, four radar towers, a large airlock door, and a few other protrusions from the lumpy surface (smaller "back door" airlocks, portholes and transparent domes for a view). The asteroid is covered with a network of small colored lights, which serve as a navigational aid. Few ships actually dock at the Shack. Instead, the Shack's own traffic control directs visitors' ships to "parking spaces," safe positions stationary relative to the Shack. A regular shuttle (a slow but reliable vessel using rock dust and a solar-powered magnetic reaction drive) picks visitors up and takes them back to their own ships, although impatient spacers sometimes get there under their own power using EVA rocket packs.

The shuttle lets visitors off into a spherical entryway some sixteen meters across, liberally decorated with plants (as are most parts of the shack). The entryway has a concierge desk beside the airlock and several short passageways leading to other parts of the Shack. The first place most visitors go is "up," to the lockers. The Shack provides inexpensive, secure storage space for pressure suits and other personal items. If "up" is at twelve o'clock, the other doorways include a store at three, a passage to the assay office at six, the infirmary at nine, and a doorway to the saloon, the Shack's main room, straight ahead.

The Store

The Shack is home to a general store, selling tools, replacement parts, environment and survival gear, drugs and medical equipment, clothing, rations, and information and amusements of all kinds. Depending on the setting it's used in, it may also carry personal weapons. The store has a door in back connecting it to a warehouse for bulk supplies (the warehouse has its own airlock to the outside for easy loading and unloading). Customers take small purchases with them, but can have large purchases sent to their ships with the Shack's shuttle when they leave.

The Assay Office

Although the assay office space is technically owned by the Shack, it is under long-term lease to a cartel of mineral firms. These companies maintain a laboratory to analyze mineral samples and small offices to negotiate contracts with prospectors. The lab is mostly automated, but it provides quite complete chemical analysis suitable to the setting (finding and providing detailed descriptions of organics and fissionables in realistic settings, monopolies and unobtainium particles in more cinematic campaigns). A handful of mining company representatives are in residence as well, each with their own office, to negotiate terms with prospectors.

Infirmary

While the Shack doesn't have elaborate medical facilities, it does have a six-bed infirmary to provide critical care,

extended treatment for severe trauma and radiation poisoning, and simple surgery. If nothing else, it can probably keep someone alive until transportation to better medical care is possible. The infirmary has its own airlock to the surface, allowing emergency docking. If technology permits, it will have a number of frozen sleep chambers for indefinite storage of the severely injured.

Saloon

If visitors head straight out of the airlock and through the entryway, they'll enter the grand saloon. The heart of the Shack is a sphere about twenty three meters across and covered with tables and tether anchor points along its inner surface. There are also clusters of small trees growing from the walls at intervals for atmosphere (in every sense of the word, as some staff members are delighted to point out). The very center of the room is often empty, but it may contain a centerpiece, such as (depending on the desired mood) a bundle of plants, a zero-g dancer in a bubble, or a 3D projection, and there's a circular bar "above" the passage to the kitchen, opposite the front entrance. Total seating capacity is about 400. However, the room's full capacity is rarely used, and tables are often removed to create a makeshift space for artistic performances or public speakers. Poles and curtains can be temporarily erected around tables for more private dining, and the Shack even has several inflatable bubbles which can be used to enclose tables for diners who prefer somewhat higher pressure or different atmospheric mixes (each bubble has small airlocks through which dishes may be passed). Orders are placed through table-top terminals and the food served by fan-driven drones, occasionally assisted by human wait-staff.

The Rooms

Two concentric rings of guest rooms are arranged around the saloon: twenty-four on the first level, twenty-six on the second, twelve or thirteen on each side of a torroidal hallway. The customer entrances to the rooms are from the saloon, again at twelve, three, six, and nine o'clock, plus service entrances from the staff section. The rooms are all fairly similar: about ten by fifteen by three meters, provided with entertainment facilities, sleeping tethers, hygiene chamber, collapsible furniture, and sliding dividers to cut the room into smaller chambers. All of the doors have moderately strong atmosphere seals allowing them to have either higher or lower pressure than the rest of the Shack for the comfort of guests, and eight of the rooms on the outer ring have airlock entryways which allow them to be filled with radically different atmospheres or even water.

Employees Only

There's a sizable section of the Shack set aside for administration, storage, and staff accommodations.

Kitchen: The kitchen -- a two-level cylinder -- communicates directly with the saloon, and with the rooms via a dumbwaiter system. Food is prepared and drinks mixed in sealed containers so that they don't float away in the microgravity environment.

Dormitory: Most of the Shack's staff lives two or three to a room in adequate but unglamorous dormitories, somewhat smaller than the guest rooms. The dormitory has a staff rec room/lounge, but cooking is done in the main kitchen. The Shack's manager, the resident doctor, and three mining company representatives all have their own larger rooms.

Offices/Control Center: Everything in The Shack has to be run from somewhere. The manager's office is above the kitchen, as is the main computer and the traffic control office.

Organic processing: One of the Shack's best features is its organic processing facility: waste processing equipment, algae and yeast tanks, and a large hydroponic garden. Much of the equipment was taken from a spaceship with a larger crew rating than the Shack's usual capacity, so the Shack usually ends up with remarkably fresh air and water. The hydroponic garden provides a variety of fresh vegetables and herbs, which makes flush prospectors eager to pay top credit for the Shack's finest dishes.

Tunnels: The Shack is built into tunnels and chambers opened up by mining, but does not fill them completely. There are a number of maintenance hatches which let techs exit the built structures and enter the tunnels they occupy, as well as wide ventilation ducts and outlying tunnels unused but sealed off and ready to be pressurized in case the Shack expands.

The Staff

In an age of cheap computers and servomechanisms, large parts of the Shack's operation are automated. The staff is mostly there for administration, skilled maintenance, and to give the Shack a human face, but menial tasks, like carrying luggage and cleaning up rooms, are performed by simple robots. Still, turnover among the human staff is high. The pay is moderate at best and the hours are long, so many of them are people who are down on their luck or couldn't find work anywhere else. Ideally, the staff breaks down something like this:

Computer techs	2
Environmental techs/gardeners	4
Traffic control techs	2
Clerk/assistant manger	2
Electrical/structural techs	3
General maintenance/janitorial	3
Shuttle pilots	1
Medical techs	2
Cooks/bartenders	4
Host/concierge	6

However, there may be gaps to be filled (perhaps by PCs needing a few credits or a quiet place to lay low for a while). Regardless of their nominal job description, most of the staff has done some asteroid mining or space travel in their time, so they're often capable of supporting the specialists, or even replacing them in a pinch. Reportedly, very close companionship can be purchased from many of the Shack's staff . . .

Using the Shack

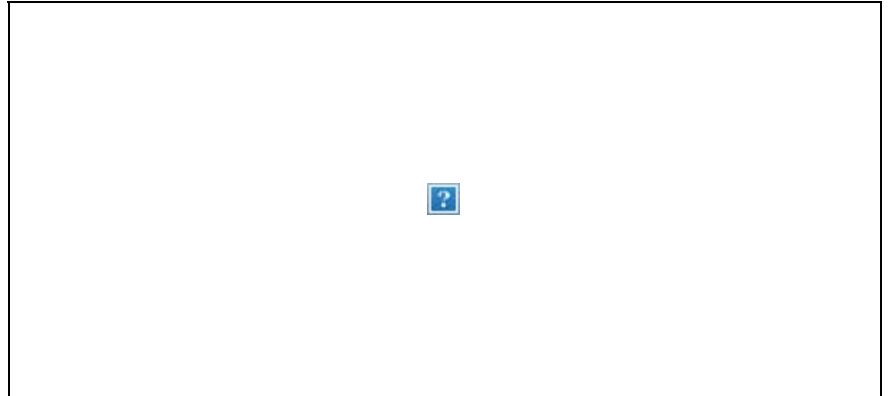
The Shack is presented as an establishment run by a single person or company. However, there's no reason that the various parts can't be operated separately. For example, the store, the assay office, the saloon, and the rooms may be run by different companies (or individual owners), while the infirmary might be a missionary establishment. Joe's might also share an asteroid with a space patrol outpost. At higher levels of technology, the Shack will probably have artificial gravity (adjustable in individual rooms, perhaps) and a whole range of atmospheres. Depending on the desired mood, the Shack could be a noisy bustling center of activity on a growing, vital frontier or a dusty, half-empty outpost on a dying fringe. It's a good location for bringing a new group of heroes together, or to send them to meet someone in hiding. And, of course, it poses any number of adventure opportunities on its own:

- **Knocking Over Joe's:** A lot of value goes through the Shack: rare mineral samples being shipped to corporate labs for further testing, small but expensive items for sale to prospectors, and a lot of cash going in all directions. It's only a matter of time before somebody decides to take it away. PCs could fit a number of roles. They could be desperate thieves moving in to knock over the Shack and get out with a fortune, space patrol officers sent to apprehend the thieves without catching innocents in the crossfire, or customers and staff at the Shack, defending themselves and their goods. The Shack itself has few defenses (it's a bar and hotel, not a fortress), but its occupants may be armed themselves.
- **The Union Label:** The mining corporations are cutting their prices, and the asteroid prospectors are organizing to form a cooperative and present a united front against them. Joe's Oxygen Shack is the natural place to get everybody together for a meeting. The meeting will be huge, with just about every freelance prospector pouring into the main room at the Shack (they'll have to move the tables out of the way), and tensions are coming to a head. PCs can be pro-coop agitators trying to get suspicious prospectors (who are fiercely independent by

definition) to go along with the plan, mining company plants trying to break up the meeting, or pro-coop counter-agents out to find and stop the "Pinkertons."

- **The Haunting of Joe's:** Something's going wrong at the Shack. A guest dies in a freak electrocution accident. A tech is killed in an atmosphere blowout. Doors which are supposed to be locked are unlocked, meals are ordered and sent up to empty rooms, and there are peculiar noises on the edge of hearing. Are strange psychotropic fungi growing in the ventilation shafts, causing carelessness and hallucinations? Is somebody trying to sabotage the Shack? Or is there something darker going on . . .

1. Assay office
2. Infirmary
3. Main entrance
4. General store
5. Lockers
6. Saloon/restaurant
7. Guest rooms
8. Kitchen
9. Administration/dormitories
10. Hydroponics/atmosphere processing



Black Flag

Capture The Flag Variations for *Frag*

by **DensityDuck!** (aka Mike Powers)

In *Frag*, Capture The Flag can be as much fun as Deathmatch, if not more. But even CTF can be more interesting with a few minor changes to the way the game is played. This article presents some concepts for changing CTF games in *Frag*, taken from the many interpretations of the game seen in First-Person Shooters; and since you don't need to be a computer programmer to change the way a boardgame plays, you can even try some of these yourself.

CTF Alterations

These are small modifications that can have an effect on the way the game plays, but don't change the basic rules of the match. These can be applied to any CTF game.

- **Wave Spawn.** Characters must wait until every third round to respawn, instead of respawning immediately after being fragged.
- **Equip on Spawn.** On the turn their character spawns, players draw one card from the Weapon deck and immediately put it into play. If they are incapable of using the weapon, it is immediately discarded.
- **Auto-Return Flags.** If a flag is picked up by a character on its team, it is immediately returned to its base rather than being carried back.
- **Timer Flags.** A dropped flag remains where it is until four rounds have passed, at which time it is returned to its base. The defenders may not pick it up. The attackers may pick it up; if one does, the "timer" is reset.
- **Defensive Flags.** A flag has a Beam Pistol (2D Energy) with unlimited ammo, which attacks any enemy character that comes within 4 squares using an Accuracy of 2. If the flag is being carried this weapon is inactive.

Variant Game Types

These modifications change the basic nature of the game, though the getting and keeping of flags is still be basic idea.

No-Team Flag (NTF)

Neither team starts with a flag. On the first turn, a flag spawns in a central area between the bases. If a team member carries the flag back to their base, their team scores a point; the flag respawns in the central area. The first team to score four points wins.

Alterations

- Add multiple flag locations, and have the flag spawn at a random one.
- As above, but have flags at all locations; once a flag has been "captured" it respawns on an empty location.
- As above, but do not respawn captured flags; once all the flags have been captured, the round ends and the side with the most flags scores a point.
- As above, but allow the flags to be "recaptured" from the enemy's base; once one team has all the flags in its base, the round ends and that team scores a point. Flags still are not returned, even if they were taken from one side's base.

Destroy the Flag (DTF)

One team has a base with a flag; the other team must do 10 points of damage to this flag. The flag always rolls as if it had Health 4. Once the flag is destroyed the round ends and the teams swap roles. The team that destroys the flag in fewer rounds wins.

Alterations

- Use unequal teams; give the defenders fewer characters to represent their advantage (they know the attackers' objective and can set up ambushes.)
- Rather than spawning defenders in random locations, limit them to spawning in the locations closest to the base.
- Make the flag immune to some weapons, or to some types of damage (e.g. no "splash" from shotguns, or half damage from energy weapons.)

Steal the Flag (STF)

One team has several flags in its base; the other team must take them out of the base to any of several "escape areas" (define these locations before the game starts). Once all the flags are in escape areas the round ends and the teams switch; the team that completes the objective more quickly wins. Flags can be returned in this game mode.

Alterations

- Three-player STF. Two attacking teams compete for the defender's flags. Escape areas are specific to one of the two attacking teams.
- Allow defenders to destroy (or seal off) the escape areas to prevent attackers from using them; if all the escape areas are sealed the defenders win the round.

No-Base CTF (NBF)

There are two flags, but they spawn on a randomly-determined weapon space rather than in a set location. Either team's players can pick up either flag. If a player is holding their own flag and picks up the enemy's flag as well, his team scores a point, and the flags respawn in random locations. If a capture is not made in eight rounds, the flags will "hop" and respawn again; characters carrying the flag at the time automatically lose it. (This prevents one team from taking an early lead and then simply sitting on one flag for the rest of the game.)

Alterations

- Multi-Flag NBF. Use three teams and three flags; a player can score by touching any two.
- If a flag takes more than a certain amount of damage (either by splash or by direct attack), it "explodes" and does 4D of damage to characters within 2 spaces, and respawns in a random location.

Pyramid Review

Rokugan (for D&D 3rd Ed/Oriental Adventures)

From [Alderac Entertainment Group](#)

Created by Rich Wulf, Shawn Carman, and Seth Mason

220 pg. HC; \$29.95

Legend of the Five Rings has always seemed more a Roleplaying Game setting than one for a Collectible Card Game. Unlike *Magic*, which was very generic in its fantasy setting, *Legend of the Five Rings* had a sense of place about it, drawing on elements and themes of Feudal Japan to create its fictitious land of Rokugan. Those elements helped the CCG, as its strong setting, with its background and evolving stories, helped draw players in and keep them there. There was even a [Salon](#) story on it.

So it seems inevitable that it would turn into an RPG. The *Legend of the Five Rings RPG* has been out for four years and two editions now, and has produced a long series of supplements. This has included the "Way of the . . ." series (describing the Clans, or family groups, of Rokugan), various adventures, and some boxed sets.

Wizards of the Coast recently released a new version of *Oriental Adventures*; instead of the *Kara-Tur* setting used in the original *Oriental Adventures*, they decided to use Rokugan as the setting. Now *Rokugan d20* expands on every aspect of the world and information presented in that book. New spells and classes (both base and prestige) are provided, there are new skills and feats, and the setting is expanded on.

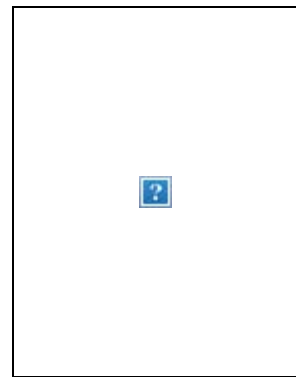
The crunchy bits are *very* crunchy.

The character generation section covers the various clans and factions of Rokugan. Since there will be next to no non-humans in an *Rokugan* game (really, can you see a Naga working with a normal hero group? Or a Nezumi?), each clan and family works as a sort of sub-race. A Lion character, for example, can be from the Kitsu family, which gives them a favored class (Shugenja), starting honor (2), an extra Class skill (Knowledge: Ancestors) and their choice of starting outfit. Some of the starting outfits seem a little off; for example, many of the families with Samurai as their Favored Class can start with a Katana & some Koku (Rokuganese for gold pieces). But Samurai start with a daisho, which is a Katana and shortsword. So do they get two? Players can also play the various minor clans, or ronin (masterless samurai). Playing Nezumi or Naga characters is another available option. But, once again, likely only for a strictly Nezumi or Naga game.

The Samurai & Shugenja classes are revised from the *Oriental Adventures* book to bring them more in line with the author's views; the changes don't seem very dramatic (the Samurai alteration, for example, changes one special ability a little). New are the Courtier, Ninja, and Inkyo (an enlightened Monk . . . which may say something about the standard Monk class) classes.

The Courtier class is suited well for campaigns set in royal courts. While many players may shy away from such classes, since they are fairly useless in any sort of rough-housing, there's something about a character that has "Wealth, Talent, Style, & Grace" as first level abilities that can be strongly appealing.

The Ninja class is also fairly scary. This class has the Base Attack Bonus of fighter . . . arguably the most martially minded character type. But then the Ninja *also* has the Rogue's Sneak Attack ability. While startling at first, the class isn't all that powerful. They have to deal with a d6 hit die, and have neither the Fighter's feats nor the Rogue's skills, making them balance out. But it definitely might give someone pause the first time it's read.



The original PC classes are also discussed. This is one of the places where a change was made that possibly wasn't described well enough. Barbarians are referred to (in most cases) as berserkers. This is fine, but if you miss that early reference telling you of the name change, you might get confused when you find clans with Berserker as a preferred class, or NPCs with Ber as one of their classes.

There are a handful of new skills (you can now perform the Tea Ceremony), and a passel of new Feats. Void Use is introduced here. This one in itself is somewhat problematic. Void Use rather sneaks up on the reader, and it seems like an important enough game mechanic that it deserves more than three-quarters of a column in the middle of the Feats section. The honor rules also seem misplaced and easy to overlook. Both rules elements are important enough that it seems they should have been put into a special section.

The honor rules appears very well-integrated with the alignment rules; especially satisfying is the way each aspect of honor is emphasized. Honor is also separated from the level system, which should help satisfy purists. There are more Prestige Classes, too. Most have a class or race requirement, which means you have to be that clan or take the Different Schools feat.

Spells take up 17 pages, and they are fairly well done. They fill in some gaps in the elemental magic of the Shugenja. Raise Dead is also taken out of the Shugenja spell lists, because it just doesn't fit the Rokugan world.

Of course, the biggest part of the setting of Rokugan is, well, the setting of Rokugan. And the book doesn't disappoint in that respect. The last third of the book consists of pure setting, with chapters covering the history, religions, sociology, and geography of Rokugan.

The Geography section is almost confusing because of the way it is organized. The various locations are marked, some with letter/number combos, others solely with letters. The letters are on the inside back cover, and the letter/numbers are in the inside front. But they don't tell you this. If you look at the front inside and assume the back inside is the same (or vice versa) you might be confused for a while. The sections on life in Rokugan are good. It makes the world feel very cohesive and gives players and GMs enough hard info and good feel to be comfortable in the setting.

Artwise, the *Rokugan* book is a bit of a mixed bag. The majority of pieces are very good, although a few pieces by William O'Conner strike me as just odd; The Crane on page 191 and the Mastermind on page 202, for example, may make you step back and shake your head.

Overall, the *Rokugan d20* supplement is very good. It does a good job of laying out the world as a game setting. If one were to look for something missing, it would probably be a lack of more characters from the original clan war setting. Many would probably like to know how many Rogue levels Bayushi Kachiko has, or Toturi's levels when he was leading his Ronin army versus when he was leading the Akodo family.

Also, as mentioned earlier, the organization and placement of some rules is less than optimal; Shadowland Taint probably shouldn't be tucked in the settings rules, and the Void Use feat should have simply said "see Void Use in the rules section." A "character index" directing the reader to the various PCs, particularly their stat blocks, would be nice. But that lack could be easily solved with Post-Its and a little patience.

Although the book audience is rather narrow (people who want to play *Legend of the Five Rings* with the *d20* rule set), those people should be very pleased with it. Hopefully a *7th Sea* adaptation, if or when it's released, will be as solid.

--Justin Mohareb

Pyramid Review

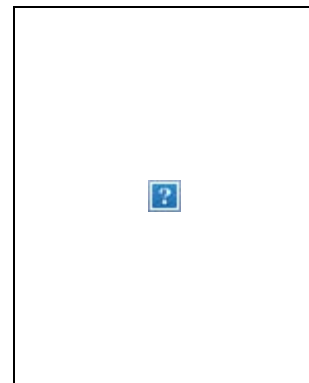
Strange Adventures in Infinite Space Computer Game

Distributed by [Cheapass Games](#)

From [Digital Eel](#)

By Rich Carlson, Iikka Keranen, and Phosphorus

CD-ROM; \$15.00



Even working with computers, James Ernest and his Cheapass elves can develop a game for \$15 in an industry that regularly commands 3-5 times that for its products. Their first foray into the high-tech world, *Strange Adventures in Infinite Space*, is less remarkable where subject matter is concerned: Mankind has reached the stars, and now in the 23rd century humanity has established itself in the Glory System on a world called Hope. They sit at the edge of an enormous nebula called the Void, and although the government has promised to license explorers once the thorium fission drive is perfected, you can't wait that long.

"Interested parties" share your impatience, so they give you a ship and a mission and send you off in search of adventure and treasure (mostly treasure). Using a star map, you travel from system to system by clicking the star you want to explore. A line extends from your current position to the new locale, which lets you see what your journey may be like. Travel too close to a black hole and you risk destruction; swerve into the nebula and your FTL drive will slow to a crawl. Assuming you make it to the new system without incident, you'll see any habitable worlds and the specimens and artifacts that may rest there. The more stuff you find, the higher your final score will be. But each mission has a time limit, and if you miss the deadline to return to Hope you get hit up for late fees. More often than not, this puts you in the hole financially.

How the scores are determined isn't spelled out, but it all seems to come down to money. Not only are you worth more if you come back with new alien artifacts and life forms, you can use much of what you find on your travels to upgrade your ship and improve your exploration and combat capabilities. Discovering new worlds -- preferably habitable ones -- improves your score as well, which often forces you to choose whether you want to go to a system whose star would support life, or a more inimical environment where new races and artifacts may lie dormant and waiting to be discovered. Which of these is the smarter play isn't clear.

Since your trip is unlicensed, you have to start out on your own. Fortunately, you may have a chance to hire experts or rogues to join your crew, or to trade for goods and better gear with passing alien cargo ships. Not all the races you'll encounter have your best interests at heart; intelligent robot insects, glowing jellyfish, and others may try to attack you. On the other hand, some of those other, friendlier alien races may offer to ally with you. They'll take part in combat (you can even control their actions in combat -- quite well, in fact), exploration, and even shipboard repairs.

Minimum System Requirements

- Pentium II 350MHz (600MHz or better recommended)
- 32M RAM (64M or more recommended)
- Windows 95/98 or ME
- DirectX 6
- DirectX compatible video card capable of 640x480 resolution
- DirectX compatible sound card
- 16M of free hard drive space

Combat, which usually results from random encounters during space travel, takes place on a separate screen; the star map disappears and gives way to a top-down view of your ship(s) in green and the enemy in red. It has some pretty subtle tactics that you'll have to suss out yourself, tactics that will change depending on what weapons and shields you have hooked up. Like travel among stars, combat is mostly clicking the ship you want and clicking the opponent you want it to engage. The computer will go after it, though it will also take opportunity fire at anything that ventures too close. Different races will come at you using different formations and weapons (weapons you sadly do not get to salvage after a fight). Various emergencies come up both in and out of combat, some of which your engineers can handle immediately, and some that may have to wait (assuming you live to fix them). Damaged systems can keep you from performing certain actions, but you always have the option to retreat when a scrape goes south on you.

Strange Adventures in Infinite Space has a lot of depth for such a simple game. Actions taken (or not taken) during one part of the mission may come back to bite you later in the game, and even the map may change as you come across new hazards and stellar phenomena. (This can play havoc with your strategy or the return trip.) You can choose the size of map you want, your ship's initial weapons, the number of enemies, the difficulty level, and even your name and that of your ship. During the journey, you may even rename the worlds you discover. There is no save function (not that you need it in the course of the brief missions), but there is a pause button that works even in combat, and you may save your career from one game to the next.

The Cheapass tradition marches proudly on, even in the digital age. Aside from the art imprinted on the CD itself, the container is a completely unremarkable diamond case. While the graphics have names, logos, website stuff, and some copyright information, WIN95/98 is the only indication buyers have as to what the system requirements are until they open the help file.

The in-game graphics are dandy little nuggets, sharp and crisp (though some, like the character portraits, look like holdovers from the early 90s), and it's usually easy to tell what's what on the screen. The only time it gets confusing is in combat, where things move at a pretty good clip and it can be hard to tell your ships what to do or who to attack as it swirls around you. There is more than one way to access most functions in the game, so *Strange Adventures in Infinite Space* can be forgiven some of the chaos of combat. The interface is completely intuitive -- want to fix a damaged system? Trade something from the hold? Switch out systems? Just point and click. It makes the game feel very much like a Cheapass board game without the burden of setting up all the components, and this straightforward setup was probably a big factor in choosing to market it.

Make sure to note the date you start, or to change the current date to the time remaining counter on the "Settings" screen. Otherwise your only time warnings will come in the middle of an unalterable flight plan. It would also have been nice if trade was a little more involved; as it stands, it seems just about any alien will take anything in trade unless you're trying to hire them.

The user's manual is a simple text file, and they're careful to give you enough information to play without betraying all the secret stuff you can come across during the game. Considering the game's 2001 copyright one might think there would be a better FAQ, even if it's only now seeing widespread distribution, but nothing crippling seems to have been overlooked. Although designed to be played in about 20 minutes, *Strange Adventures in Infinite Space* takes up far more time than that. Every individual mission takes about that long, but there is plenty of variety and the only real limits on how long you'll play are your job and the intrusive arrival of daylight.

--Andy Vetromile

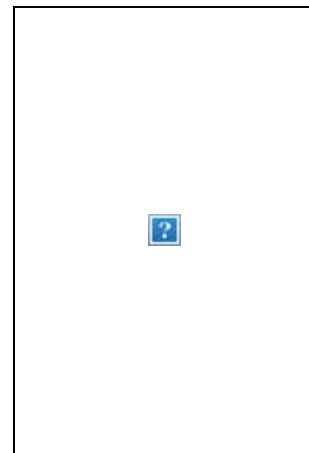
Pyramid Pick

Formula Motor Racing

Published by [GMT Games](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Illustrated by Rodger B. MacGowan & Mark Simonitch



54 color cards, 12 plastic cars; \$16

For fans of Formula One racing, the agreed game to play is *Formula Dé* from French publisher Jeux Descartes. With over thirty different boards representing racing tracks from across the world now available, players can now simulate whole seasons in either Formula One or Indy Car racing. Yet playing time for a race usually takes about two hours, and sometimes you don't want to fiddle around with a big board and lots of dice for that long. For those moments, when you want full throttle action, in a sixth of the time, there is an alternative.

Designed by Reiner Knizia, *Formula Motor Racing* comes from American publisher, GMT Games -- better known for their range of historical wargames. Inside can be a deck of fifty-four Action cards, six Team Pit Crew cards -- one in each of the six team colors, twelve plastic cars -- two each in the six team colors, a single twelve-sided die, an eight-page rulebook and a pad of score sheets. The team colors are blue, green, orange, purple, red, and yellow. All of these components fit nicely into the sturdy box. Note that there is no racing track . . .

The aim of Formula Motor Racing is to manoeuvre your team of two cars into winning the Constructor's Championship, by scoring as many points as possible across an agreed number of races to reflect an individual season. Rather than concentrating upon going round and round in a circle, players win races by moving both their own cars -- and those of the other teams -- up and down the race order. At the end of a race, points are scored as in Formula One, with a record of these kept across a simulated season to determine the end of season winner. The score sheets are used to record these points, and while permission is given to photocopy more as needed, it would be a matter of minutes to create a table in either Microsoft Word or Excel.

Three to six players can take part in a season, which begins with each of them selecting their team color. In a three-player game, a player controls two teams. Regardless of the number of players, all cars remain in the race, with non-selected colors representing uncontrolled teams. Each race begins with the random drawing of Team Pit Crew cards. The cars corresponding with the color of the first Team Pit Crew card drawn are placed in pole position and twelfth position; those of the second card are placed in second and eleventh place; and so on, until the cars of the last card drawn are placed in sixth and seventh place. This line of cars is placed on the table; each player will need to be able to reach all of the cars throughout the game. Finally, the Action cards are shuffled, and five are dealt to each player.

The player with the car in pole position takes the first turn. He plays and discards a single Action card, then replenishes his hand with a new card from the deck. And that's it! Play continues until the deck is exhausted; then each player has the opportunity to take one more turn. At the end of this, the race order of the cars is finalized; thus the winner determined and points awarded.

When each player puts down an Action card, it can be played upon any of the cars in the race, limited only by the conditions given on the card itself. The fifty-four-card deck is split between thirty-four advance cards and twenty trouble cards, and also between team colors and black colored cards. The team-colored cards can only be played on a car from that team, while black cards can be played on any car currently in the race. The cards represent the panoply of maneuvers and events that can be taken, or take place throughout a race.

Most of the advance cards represent the simple Overtake maneuver, which allows a car to jump anywhere from two to four places. This card is advantageous to the car behind that one as well, as it can ride in the slipstream of the advancing car and also change race position. Overtake cards are (as discussed) color-coded, as are most of the Pit Stop cards, which send a car to the pits for a randomly determined loss of places in the race order. There are also two black-colored Pit Stop cards that can be played on any car. The die is also used to determine which car is affected by cards such as Spin Last card (which sends a car to the last place in race), Spin Out (which sends a car spinning out of the race), and the dreaded Crash. The Crash card not only takes a random car out of the race, but also the one behind or ahead of it -- chosen by the whoever played the card. The remainder of the cards provide various effects, mostly loss of place.

Although Formula Motor Racing concentrates upon the Constructor's Championship, one suggested option would be to run a Driver's Championship as well by marking the cars with numbers. To be honest, this might be a little fiddly, and other option might include buying a *Formula Dé* Pewter Car Set and painting them in your own colors -- although there are only ten cars in the set. Alternatively, larger die-cast toy cars can be purchased and modified. In the Constructor's Championship the focus is upon scoring as many points as possible, not necessarily upon winning. Just as in the real thing, a season of *Formula Motor Racing* can be won by achieving multiple second and third places throughout the various races. This focus just shifts slightly with the inclusion of the Driver's Championship, as players want the kudos of getting their number one driver onto the winning podium.

There are just two slight -- very slight -- problems with *Formula Motor Racing*. First is the lack of interplay between players, other than through the determination of race order. (One option that our gaming group has experimented with is to have each player exchange one of the cards in his hand with that of another player before he draws a new card at the end of his turn.) The other problem is that moving the cars up and down the race order throughout the game gets a little tricky, and we found ourselves spacing out the race order to make moving the cars easier.

Formula Motor Racing plays fast and easy. It is designed for players aged eight and up, and the simple mechanics reflect that. Yet the various effects that the cards really do have the feel of a Grand Prix race, so much so that you can just imagine Murray Walker or Jack Arute or Danny Sullivan providing the commentary to very game!

--Matthew Pook

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Try It . . . You Might Like It!

I've only roller-skated once, and I fell down so many times that I was black and blue for days afterwards . . . and I did *not* have a good time. But it's been almost ten years since that last attempt, so who knows? Perhaps I should try it again.

But I get ahead of myself.

It seems many folks didn't much care for my cryptogram column from two weeks ago, and thus gave it a good ol' nuking in the ratings; this was expected. It also seems a fair number of people disagreed with the premise of the column itself, where real puzzles encountered by characters can be thrown at players; this was less expected. Apparently many players believe in a strict wall between player and character knowledge; I believe the notion the *heroes* might become stuck because the *players* cannot come up with a solution to a puzzle rubs them the wrong way. (And then some players liked the ideas I presented, and wrote to thank me for the ideas . . .)

Anyway, it seems that this issue of the wall (or lack thereof) between players and characters is full of possibilities. And, as in all things, I try to see both sides of this issue. I certainly think it's an interesting enough dichotomy to devote a column or two to the subject. But not yet; it will probably be at least a week or two before I think everything through.

For the time being, I thought I'd share one of the design philosophies of both the magazine, my gaming, and (to a certain extent) my life. Namely, I enjoy challenging my beliefs; I appreciate trying things I've either presumed (or confirmed in the past) I didn't like. And, even when I don't like or agree with something, I still try to see what I can enjoy out of the experience, and codify what I *don't* like.

What does this have to do with the price of pears in Peoria?

Well, take *Pyramid*. Don Thompson, late editor of the *Comic Buyers Guide*, had a gift with his ability to review comics. Even when he didn't particularly like a comic, he was generally able to tell who *would*; he was able to say with a high degree of accuracy, "If you are the sort of person who likes comics of this sort, then you will (or won't) like this comic." In other words, even if he didn't like, say, True Crime comics, he was able to determine what made good True Crime comics good, and whether or not a new True Crime comic would be of interest. When you think about it, that's an *incredibly* useful ability, especially for an editor. Let's say you're the kind of person who hates action movies. Now, if you don't have that ability, then how can you determine how, say, *Speed* compares as a movie versus *Mission to Mars*? Or even *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*?

I've tried mightily to be similar in my balance with *Pyramid*. Even though I'm usually a pretty rules-light kind of guy, I need to try and figure out what gearhead crunchy types of articles will be of interest to those who like gearhead crunchy articles. I haven't played CCGs with any vigor for a few years, but I can hopefully discern what articles for that game type folks will like. And so on. I like to think that I usually get it right, but sometimes I don't. Those times I fail, I apologize; and which is why -- as a complete tangential aside -- I always value feedback of all forms, to let me *know* when I've missed (or hit) the mark. (That email address, as ever, is pyramid@sjgames.com)

Anyway, with *Pyramid* I even run articles that I don't necessarily agree with, or would otherwise find useful in my own gaming, because I feel it's important to present alternative viewpoints, give readers with different tastes something they'll like, *or* show folks something to think about. (Heck, sometimes I don't even agree with *my* column, but am instead just presenting an alternative view or an angle that I *might* agree with . . .)

Likewise, in my gaming I like to challenge my own assumptions and preconceived notions. For example, I usually tend to run rather Byzantine campaigns; plot twists, elements that throw the players off-balance, and strange developments (often involving the bending nature of Reality itself) are fairly common with me. So every once in a while I'll force myself to do something I don't normally like . . . maybe a hack-n-slash adventure, maybe a straightforward "find the object" quest, maybe an open trading/exploration simulation. (The latter I don't necessarily

dislike, but I'm really bad at. And thus I hear our *Traveller* fans collectively shake their heads in disappointment . . .) My reasons for this are myriad.

Sometimes I like to make sure I don't like a particular type of game; the aforementioned trading/exploration game, for example, was generally in my "dislike" column until a particularly fun *Exalted* session where that's pretty much *all* the heroes did. Now it's moved into the "like it, but not very good at it" column (a column I've often used for . . . er, nevermind).

Sometimes I like to do something different just to see what I can bring to the mix. Much in the same way that *A.I.* was a Stanley Kubrick film through the eyes of Steven Spielberg (with quite interesting results), I like to run a hack-n-slash scenario -- even when I may not want to -- just to see how I can do things differently. Sometimes these experiments work; sometimes they don't. Regardless, I always try to walk away from those lapses of the usual with *something* in my pocket . . . be it a new appreciation for a previously disliked form, some variant ideas for altering my own ruts, or at *least* some new ways for my players to diplomatically tell me they really didn't like that last game.

The same sense of horizon-broadening goes for me as a player. I almost always play characters that have highly developed moralities (codes against killing, duties to protect the innocent, and so on). So once I made a character that was *specifically* amoral and questionable. Now, as the game progressed I found myself invariably drifting her towards having a code of honor and conduct. But the *way* she developed those ideals were very unique to me as a player, and they were still askew from my normal archetype (for example, she was primarily a defender of and duty-bound to her family . . . and the code against killing she developed did *not* apply to any who threatened her kin). So, even though I still tend to play the "too-dumb-to-die" paladin-types, I consider that one to be one of my best (and most fun) ever.

Finally, as a person I try to do things I've done before, but found not to my liking. For example, I find myself rather fond of live classical music now because of a good experience a while ago, despite some bad (and boring) experiences as a child. The same goes for eggplant, three-hour movies, and Indian food. Of course, I *still* don't like raw onions, watching golf, or (as a rule) action movies.

Anyway, the point of all of this is, it's a big world. A big, wonderful world full of people with different ideas, philosophies, outlooks, and ways of doing things. Although we all need to find our own way of doing things, I personally think it's a mistake to consider our own ways as the One True Way. And maybe, just maybe, you might consider giving something a try you "know" you hate. Who knows? At the very least you may come up with new reasons *why* you dislike what you dislike. You might even up changing your mind, and possibly adding something Neat, New, and Different to your life.

Or you might end up black and blue, vowing never to roller-skate again.

* * *

As I'm sure you've noticed, Ken Hite's taking the week off. That's because, even as I type, he's a guest at the [World Horror Con](#) in Chicago. With Neil Gaiman and Jill Thompson, along with bunches of other neat, cool, and snazzy people. Not that I'm jealous. Horribly, horribly jealous . . . Er, anyway, we hope he'll be back next week. With enough autographed goodies for all of us.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Evil**, a **d20** book from Alderac, p. 2.* (Although I've received an email from the inimitable [Ryan Dancey](#) who says that this anecdote may have *another* origin . . . I'll see if I can get to the bottom of this . . .)

(One star) The world of Pentex and the vampires is already most of the way to being cyberpunk; only the technology is missing. And once it arrives, it brings challenges and threats to the Garou. Do cybermods corrupt as surely as Wyrms-taint? Or can there be a cyber-enhanced Garou? The Glass Walkers and their use of the net-spiders will certainly come into their own.

Sports in Roleplaying Games

by David Morgan-Mar

Many people enjoy playing sports. Even more people like watching spectator sports, a pastime which has become a major form of recreation in modern society. RPG characters need time off from their adventures, so it is likely that many characters will have an interest in or participate actively in sports. This article discusses how sports can be used in roleplaying games, and presents some optional rules for treating them in a little more detail in *GURPS*.

Sports in the Campaign

Whether or not the optional rules for *GURPS* presented later in this article are adopted, it is worth examining how sports can be used in an adventure or campaign, in any RPG system.

In many types of campaign, an athlete is a suitable character type. The character may be a serious amateur athlete, such as an Olympic competitor (before professionals were allowed to compete), or may engage in sport for a living. Other characters for whom sports may form an important part of their personality are the fan and the weekend athlete.

An interest in sports, either through fanhood or participation, provides a focus for roleplayers. Since many of us are familiar with sports, it gives an easy hook for the player to get into character, and a point of reference through which others can relate to the character. Not many of us know what goes on in a nuclear physicist's head, but if he's also a Tigers fan, or bowls on Friday nights, then we know something through which we can engage him in conversation and understand some of his motivations.

A sports background can also justify the knowledge of certain skills not otherwise widely known, or suggest certain personality traits for roleplaying. Finally, sports can be used to provide game ideas for the GM and hooks to pull characters into adventure scenarios.

The Sports Fan

"Mighty Man! The Green Fiend has escaped and is terrorizing Megalopolis!"

"Hang on . . . the Giants are trailing by 2 with 3 minutes to go . . ."

Sports fans are common throughout many eras, whether gladiatorial spectator or modern football-lover; this can, of course, extend to cyberhockey or whatever events people of the future will watch. Any character of an appropriate time period can have the personality quirk of being a sports fan. Such a person will seek out scores for their favored sports and teams when they can, and either listen on radio, watch on TV, or attend events in person when convenient.

A more dedicated fan will attempt to tune in or attend even when it's *not* so convenient, and may possess an annoying habit of neglecting duties or friends when there is a big game on. This could lead to trouble at work or with personal relationships. Getting a glimpse of the action or a score update during an otherwise demanding situation might cause a dangerous distraction.

Some fans seem to have a photographic memory for scores, statistics, and obscure trivia -- an ability which could translate either into a brilliant all-round memory, mathematical talent, or absent-mindedness over anything *other* than sports. Armchair coaches may have brilliant strategic and tactical skills, or may simply harbor delusions that they do.

Adventure Seeds

- Someone who wants a sports fan out of the way for several hours (an enemy, rival, or someone who wants to commit a crime) send him impossible-to-get tickets to a Big Game. The recipient will be hard-pressed to

question where the tickets came from and why, and might be more likely to just go and enjoy the game while his home is searched, bugged, or trapped.

- A fan wins an invitation to spend a day at his team's training camp before the new season. In a quiet corner, two of his idols get into an argument and start fighting, with only the hero to break it up. Team management queries the witness about the incident and disciplines (or sacks) one of the athletes, who then develops a grudge against the PC.
- An evil villain (or supervillain) has chosen the local stadium as the venue for his latest mischief. The PCs in the crowd catch a glimpse of something suspicious and must either try to convince skeptical security staff, or do something to thwart the diabolical plan . . . without causing a panic and disaster among the huge crowd.

The Weekend Athlete

"We've arranged to meet with the Kelly Mob on Wednesday to cut a deal on the diamonds. Be at the Pink Boa at 8, and pack some heat."

"But boss! Dat's my bowling night!"

Many people enjoy playing sport at least as much as watching it. These are the ones with a regular job who spend their days off practicing their golf, hitting a tennis ball with friends, or playing in the local softball competition. These people often have a semi-regular social commitment which they will be reluctant to break under normal circumstances, and less spare time for adventuring because of it. On the other hand, a regular circle of sporting acquaintances can provide contacts with a collection of diverse knowledge and skills. John the cop doesn't know the first thing about stopping an alien plague, but his squash buddy Phil is an epidemiologist.

An interest in sports can also be used as an excuse to meet and interact with someone. The classic example is James Bond toying with Auric Goldfinger over a supposedly chance meeting for a social game of golf. Many NPCs are good candidates for having sporting habits, and heroes wishing to meet them, or investigate them, will find good opportunities to do so if they can share the experience.

Weekend athletes will have one or a few physical skills related to their sports of choice at moderate levels. They are probably better than average health, strength, or reflexes, since active people tend to be fitter than sedentary ones. They can sometimes be braggarts, or sore losers, or supremely overconfident in their abilities. Especially good or poor performances may earn them a minor reputation among a small circle of friends.

Adventure Seeds

- Unknown to the heroes, one of their tennis (or other sports) partners has acquired an enemy. As a classic example, the friend may be a spy, and kept this fact secret from his social group. Their buddy has a heart attack and dies (or is rushed to the hospital) during a game, but first manages to pass on some cryptic information or an object to the heroes. The victim's enemies decide the heroes now have something they want, and do their best to get it.
- At a chance meeting over a game of golf or other suitable sport, a newly-met person starts dropping hints that he may be interested in hiring the heroes for a job. This leads naturally into many other plots, but leaves open the question of who arranged the meeting, and his true motives.
- A community sports league teammate has a bad string of poor performances. He visits a psychic, who tells him he is under a curse and his life will get worse until disaster strikes. He appeals to his friends (the heroes) for help. They must determine if there really is a curse, and if so, who laid it and how to remove it . . . hopefully all before the league playoffs start and their friend's misfortune ruins their championship chances!

The Amateur Athlete

"Sorry I'm late, sir . . . Training. For the Olympic Games, you know."

"Do it again, Jones, and we'll see if that bloody rowing puts food on your table."

Amateur athletes are dedicated competitors who take part in serious competition, often at an elite level, for no financial gain. They must have some way of supporting themselves financially, so sports will not be their entire life unless they have the luxury of wealth or independent income. If they do not, they will often struggle to make a living. An amateur athlete template could be added to almost any character, justifying the knowledge of skills such as martial arts, archery, throwing, dodging, running, or swimming.

Amateur athletes are most likely to be found from the Victorian era through to the 1970s (or thereabouts), but may also be found in older historical periods such as ancient Greece. Students are also commonly amateur athletes, right to the present day and probably beyond. Characters especially suited to being amateur athletes may be found in Victorian horror, steampunk, European colonial, and cliffhangers era campaigns. Common amateur sports include track and field, swimming, boxing, wrestling, rugby, and golf.

Amateurs must train often, usually most of the time which they don't spend at their jobs. The amateur may be obsessed with his chosen sport, thinking of little else and perhaps casting everything into sporting metaphors.

Adventure Seed

- A promising athlete struggling to make ends meet financially is approached by a well-dressed person with a proposition. He will offer a large sum of money for a simple favor: Deliberately losing at the next big competition. This is clearly immoral, but the cash will be tempting. Taking it will result in an ever-increasing spiral of corruption and potential scandal, while trying to report the person will create a powerful enemy.
- A government or other organization wishes to place a spy into a foreign country. It either recruits an amateur athlete or uses an agent with athletic ability to enter the country under the pretense of competing in a competition. Early modern Olympic Games are a good setting for such a scenario -- particularly Berlin in 1936. Ancient Olympic Games can be used as settings for similar intrigue in classical Greek campaigns.
- A group of amateur athletes need to cross the country to compete in a big meet. Depending on the era, different modes of travel might be used. Trains are particularly interesting, and provide good settings for adventure along the way. Besides adventures and other eventful delays, the heroes need to get where they are going in time, and still be in a fit state to compete!

The Professional Athlete

"Hey! You're Reggie Jordan! Fantastic game last week! Can I have your autograph?"
"Er . . . sure. But I really just want to pay this bill . . ."

Professional athletes earn their keep by playing sports, so their skills are tuned more exclusively to their sport of choice. This does not preclude other experience; it is certainly possible for the professional footballer to be as well-rounded as any other character. Particularly suitable secondary skills include those related to human physiology, psychology, administration, public speaking, journalism, politics, and teaching. Of course some pros are simply all brawn and little brain, but this can also be an entertaining roleplaying opportunity. Many professionals are well-known to the general public, and some have considerable reputations (not always good!) or social status due to their celebrity. Of course, fame opens many doors, but can also be a terrible inconvenience or make one a target of stalkers or other sociopaths.

Professional athletes are rare at the beginning of the 20th century, and become more common with time, until there are many thousands engaging in dozens of different sports worldwide today (some for enormous salaries). Many Roman gladiators were also essentially professional athletes. Sports commonly played professionally today include soccer, football (of various types such as American, Australian rules, or Gaelic), baseball, basketball, ice hockey, cricket, tennis, golf, boxing, motor racing, cycling, and numerous others.

A professional athlete will spend as much time training as anyone else spends on their job, and be concerned with maintaining fitness and form. An important aspect of this career will probably be seeking more or better opportunities for earning money, either through playing contracts or endorsements.

Adventure Seeds

- One or more of the heroes play or work for a professional sports organization; when the star player fails to show up for training on Monday, people start to get nervous. Phone calls reach only an answering machine, and nobody knows where he is. The party investigates, hoping to find him before the big game on the weekend.
- A PC is approached by a pro athlete (either a player on the same team, or just a friend) who requests help dealing with a problem. The athlete has run up gambling debts with some shady characters, and needs a way out without alerting the police, team management, or the media. This can be particularly tricky if the person with the problem is the team's star player, a role model adored by children, and the best chance to make the playoffs. Ideally the heroes should have a strong desire to support the team.
- The characters are professional gladiators (either historical, fantasy, or science fiction -- or in a present day campaign they could be pro wrestlers). Their fights are normally fixed, to provide entertainment without danger of serious injury. A rival manager has arranged for some of his fighters to fight dirty, however, which the heroes will need to recognize and then deal with in the ring. There will be consequences after the fight, especially if they had to kill their opponents; the person behind it all will need to be tracked down and dealt with.

Sports in *GURPS*

There are, of course, rules in *GURPS* covering sports. Apart from combat sports however, they consist only of a generic Sports skill with minimal description, and the Contest of Skills rules to be applied at the GM's discretion.

For many purposes the existing rules are enough. But sometimes the outcome of a competition can be crucial to an adventure. An extended resolution can then be useful to allow characters the chance to interact (or cheat) during the event and players to enjoy the thrills and suspense leading to the result.

Combat Sports

Combat sports are covered by the rules on pp. CII92-93, and the Combat Sport skill (p. MA32, p. CI133). A few additional points are worth noting.

If the optional maneuver rules from *GURPS Martial Arts* or *Compendium II* are not in use, most combat sports simply use one of the following skills:

- Boxing Sport: Western style boxing.
- Wrestling Sport: Greco-Roman or Freestyle wrestling. (Pro wrestling uses the skill of Wrestling Art.)
- Karate Sport: Martial arts sports involving striking.
- Judo Sport: Martial arts sports involving grappling and throwing.
- Fencing Sport: Fencing.
- Katana Sport: Kendo.

All skill rolls in the combat can be made against the one skill.

Some other combat skills might also be turned into sports in specific settings. Lasso Sport (against cattle) works for rodeos, a form of Flail Sport was used in the *Star Trek* episode "Amok Time," and a decadent culture might even get some entertainment out of Brawling Sport.

If maneuvers are being used, a specific martial arts style can be used to represent different combat sport disciplines. *GURPS Martial Arts* will be invaluable in this case. The maneuvers can then be used for appropriate combat tactics in the detailed method of resolving a bout.

Sumo wrestling is a special case. It uses the Sumo Wrestling skill; there is no specific Sumo Wrestling Sport skill, since Sumo is never performed in real combat. The rules for resolving a Sumo match are given in the skill description (p. MA35, p. CI136).

An additional skill usually required for formal combat sports is Tournament Law. The GM should require rolls against this skill in each round of a bout to avoid infringing a rule and being called for a foul. Note that Tournament Law requires specialization, and it must be bought separately for each different combat sport.

Archery and Target Shooting

Archery uses the skill of Bow Sport (a type of Combat Sport skill). This is the skill of firing arrows accurately at non-moving targets under competition conditions. The usual -3 defaults apply between Bow and Bow Sport -- a competition archer will have trouble adjusting to actual combat, while a skilled combat Bowman will wilt under the pressure of archery competition unless trained for it.

Similar comments apply to competitive target shooting, which uses the skill of Guns Sport, specialized in whatever form of gun is being used. Note that both Bow Sport and Guns Sport can be bought up from the default skill level granted by Bow and Guns respectively (or vice versa). This means that characters who wish to be proficient at both combat shooting and target shooting must take two different skills but do not need to spend an inordinately large number of character points.

Archers use the standard *GURPS* combat rules to see if they hit their target. Shots will always be aimed for more than three seconds, giving the standard +3 aiming and Accuracy bonuses. *GURPS Harkwood* has rules for determining which scoring zone of a multi-ring target is hit (pp. HA43-44). Apply the target size modifier for the whole target. If the skill roll is made exactly, the outermost scoring zone is hit. For each extra point the roll is made by, the arrow lands one ring closer to the bullseye.

Modern archery targets have ten scoring zones, so using this system a roll would have to be made by 9 points to hit the bullseye. A natural 3 will also hit the bullseye, while any other critical success which does not hit the bullseye by the point-count rule can be considered to have hit one zone out.

This zone-counting rule is easy to apply, but not strictly in keeping with *GURPS* missile fire rules: An aimed shot at a target the size of a modern archery bullseye should only have a -6 size penalty, not -10 or -11 (-9 plus -1 or -2 for the target size itself). If desired, the exact size modifiers can be used to determine the amount by which a skill roll must be made to hit a particular scoring zone. In some cases, the same modifier applies to multiple zones -- separating these zones can be done with a second skill roll or by equal chance. The exact size penalties for modern archery target zones are given in the table.

Scoring zone	<i>122cm target</i>		<i>80cm target</i>	
	Zone diameter	Penalty	Zone diameter	Penalty
1	48.0"	-1	31.5"	-2
2	43.2"	-1	28.3"	-2
3	38.4"	-1	25.2"	-2
4	33.6"	-2	22.0"	-3
5	28.8"	-2	18.9"	-3
6	24.0"	-3	15.7"	-4
7	19.3"	-3	12.6"	-4
8	14.4"	-4	9.4"	-5
9	9.6"	-5	6.3"	-5
10	4.8"	-6	3.1"	-6

Modern archery assigns point values from 1 to 10 for the target zones from outermost to innermost. A competition consists of four rounds, each of 36 arrows, fired at targets from distances of 30, 50, 70, and 90 meters (27.4, 45.7, 64.0, 82.3 yards), corresponding to *GURPS* range penalties of -7, -9, -9, and -10 respectively. The 50 meter range is only

just outside the range for a -8 penalty, so -8 could be used instead if the GM likes the progression it provides. The two shorter ranges use an 80cm target, while the longer ranges use a 122cm target.

For historical or fantasy periods, the target sizes and competition structure can be modified as desired. Gun shooting targets and competitions vary too widely to be detailed here, but some (such as skeet shooting) use moving targets which will require target speed to be factored into the speed/range modifier. Otherwise, simply apply the principles outlined for archery.

Athletic Contests and Races

One-on-one athletic contests and races are most simply resolved with a Contest of Skills. A Quick Contest can be used for discrete events such as broad jumping, while a full Contest is suitable for races, including running, swimming, animal riding, and vehicle races.

If you need to determine the exact finishing order of multiple competitors, make an appropriate skill roll for each athlete. Order the athletes by the amounts by which their skill rolls were made, extended through to failure amounts. Any critical successes are placed in the first position, while critical failures represent a disqualification (or injury). Any pairs of athletes ordered in the same position should roll a Quick Contest of Skills to separate them (in a race, a tied result here indicates a dead heat). If more than two athletes are initially ordered at the same placing, order this subgroup by the same method as the entire group. This method can also be used for animal or vehicle races, using appropriate riding or vehicle operation skills.

Individual Sports

Many individual sports are not covered by the categories of combat sports, target shooting, or athletic contests. Examples include tennis, squash, golf, ten-pin bowling, pool. Generally, a full Contest of Skills is the best way to resolve such a match.

If more detail is required, a Contest of Skills can be used to resolve separate parts of a game. There are too many different sports to cover each in detail, but the following examples should give an idea of the sort of details which can be simulated:

- Each set of a tennis match. The amount by which the contest is won can be used to generate a game score for the set.
- Each hole of a round of golf. Allow ties for each hole. Each hole won gives the winner a one stroke advantage over the opponent, or two for a critical success.

Team Sports: The Abstract Team Sports Resolution System

Team sports can be resolved using a method similar to the Abstract Mass Combat system in GURPS Compendium II. Use the following procedure:

1. **Determine Team Strengths.** The Team Strength of a team is the sum of the appropriate Sports skill levels of all players who take an active part in the game. If one team used more players, choose a number of the highest-skilled players equal to the number on the other team to count at full skill and add only 2 levels for each additional player. Divide the higher total by the lower to produce a ratio. (This procedure can be made more complex by counting only half the skill of a player substituted after half the game, and so on, if desired.)
2. **Player Characters' Contribution.** Any PCs or significant NPCs in the game must make a roll against the appropriate Sports skill to determine what effect they have on the game. Refer to the following list:
 - *Made by 10+ (or critical success):* Legendary contribution, +2 Reputation for a year, +1 Reputation permanently, +2 to coach's skill for quick contest.
 - *Made by 7-9:* Great contribution, +1 Reputation for 1d weeks, +1 to coach's skill.
 - *Made by 4-6:* Good contribution, +1 to coach's skill.

Made by 0-3: Played competently.

- *Missed by 1-3*: Played poorly, -1 to coach's skill.
- *Missed by 4-6*: Played miserably, -1 Reputation for 1d weeks, -2 to coach's skill.
- *Missed by 7+ (or critical failure)*: Injured, see Determine Injuries below.

3. **Modify Coaches' Skills.** The outcome of the game depends heavily on the skills of the team coaches. The relevant skill is Professional Skill (Coach), which any professional coach will have at 12 or better. The skill of each team's coach is modified using all relevant modifiers from the following list:

- *Ratio of team strengths*: Stronger team's coach gains a bonus as follows.

Ratio	Bonus
1.05 or less	No bonus
1.05+ to 1.1	+1
1.1+ to 1.15	+2
1.15+ to 1.2	+3
1.2+ to 1.25	+4
1.25+ to 1.3	+5
1.3+ or more	+6

- *Home field advantage*: +1
- *Coach's Leadership*: +1 per 2 full skill points above Leadership-10
- *Sympathetic referee/umpire (GM's decision)*: +1
- *Bribed referee/umpire*: +1 to +4 depending on official's reaction
- *Weary team*: -1 to -3 for inadequate rest since previous game
- Other appropriate modifiers at GM's discretion.

4. **Quick Contest of Effective Coach Skills.** Roll a Quick Contest of the modified coaches' skills. If the sport allows ties, a tied contest stands, otherwise reroll any tie. The margin of victory in the Quick Contest is a general indicator of the victory margin in the game, and should be interpreted in appropriate fashion by the GM.

5. **Determine Injuries.** Possible injuries to PCs and significant NPCs have been decided at step 3 above. To determine how many other players were injured, roll a number of dice equal to the number of other players and count the number of ones rolled. For an injury-prone sport (football, ice hockey) divide by two, for a safer sport (baseball, volleyball) divide by three, and drop any fraction. This is the number of minor NPC players injured. Roll a random hit location for each injured character. Limbs are crippled as per the rules on p. B127 and recover as per p. B129, including the HT roll to determine lasting effects. Other locations indicate wounds such as broken ribs or concussion which render a character incapacitated, but which also recover as per p. B129.

Generating Scorelines

Sometimes a random scoreline for a team sport game might be needed, either for keeping detailed results for an ongoing tournament, or simply for flavor. The following method can be used to generate appropriate point scores for many sports.

First, decide what is an average score for one side in the sport in question. This is the total number of points scored by a team over a large number of games, divided by the number of games. Note the average may be a fraction. Then use whichever of these applies:

- *If the average score is below 10*, multiply by 6 and then round to the nearest whole number. Roll that many (six-sided) dice. Count the number of ones rolled. This count is the generated score.
- *If the average score is equal to or greater than 10*, divide it by 2.5, and round the result to the nearest whole number. Roll that many dice, add up the total, and subtract the number of dice from the total. The result is the generated score.

If the result of the game is known (either by plot necessity, or using the

resolution system above) do this once for each team, assigning the larger score to the winner. If the winner has not been decided already, use different average scores for each team -- for example a poor basketball team might average 80 points per game, so roll 32d-32 for its score, while a good team might average 115 and roll 46d-46. This obviously gives a good chance that the better team will win, but allows upsets. The dice may need to be rolled in batches if the number required is more than the number of dice you own. Of course, a simple computer program can easily automate the procedure (see right). If some scores are impossible (such as 1 in American football), either reroll or assign a nearby score.

Note this is a simple method for gaming purposes and not meant to simulate accurately the distribution of scores in various sports. In particular, scores of zero or other low scores are more likely to occur in real life. GMs with a statistical bent may like to devise more complicated systems.

Examples

In soccer, the average score for a team is only about 0.8 goals per game. Six times this is 4.8, so roll five dice and count the number of ones to generate a team's score. If two dice come up showing one, the team's score for the game is two goals. In basketball, an average score might be about 100 points. Divided by 2.5, this gives 40, so roll 40d-40 to generate the score. This gives a range from 0 to 200 points, with 100 being the most likely (and the vast majority of scores falling within the range 70-130).

Score Generator

Enter average score:

Result:

Designer's Notes: Munchkin 2: Unnatural Axe

(And Other Things Munchkin-y)

by Steve Jackson

Unnatural Axe is an expansion set for *Munchkin*. Like the original game, it's designed by Steve Jackson and illustrated by John Kovalic.

I really didn't expect *Munchkin* to be this much of a hit. I knew it was a good theme. I knew it was a good game system. I knew John's art was great. But . . . we sold out our first press run quickly. Our *second*, much bigger, press run is almost gone, and people keep asking for more.

So of course there had to be an expansion.

In fact, my only real dissatisfaction with the original *Munchkin* set was "too few cards." It was originally designed with two decks (112 cards). In playtest, we were almost always going through the whole deck before the game ended. That led to more repetition than I liked. So we figured out a way to afford an extra deck. That gave us enough cards -- a total of 168 -- that many games never saw the bottom of the deck.

However, most games still get *close* to the bottom of the deck. And while the order in which the cards appear makes a huge difference to the way the game plays, it would be even better if an average game left a *lot* of cards unturned. So I was very enthusiastic about being able to add another 112 cards. Well, when you open the package, 107, because *Unnatural Axe* has five blanks. But I figure you'll use most of them.¹

The Package

Speaking of the package . . . it's a new idea for us, and therefore worthy of mention. In order to keep the price of the expansion as low as possible, we wanted to make the packaging as *cheap* as possible. After all, you already have the *Munchkin* box. You don't need another box.

The original plan was to put it in an envelope. But retailer feedback shot that down. An envelope doesn't have a spine, which means that you can't put it on the shelf. Well, you can, but nobody can tell what's in it.

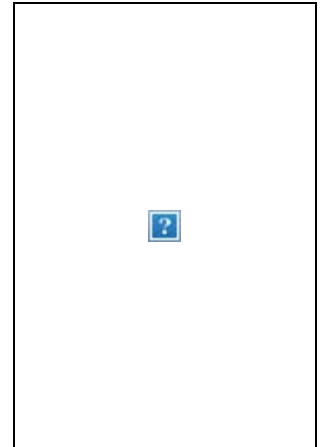
So we went around and around, and finally came up with the very simple packaging you see now. It's just a piece of cardboard, folded twice . . . but that gives it a nice wide spine. The shrinkwrap holds it together. Our standard shrinkwrap, while just fine for protecting boxes, turned out to be a bit too light for an application where it was actually required to be part of the "structure" of the package. So we use heavier shrinkwrap on that. No problem.

The feedback from the retailers so far has been favorable; unless something new comes up, you can figure we'll do more packages like that in the future when we're selling something that doesn't need a box.

The New Rules

What new rules? We don't need any new rules. We have rules now.

Yep, that was the design philosophy. *Unnatural Axe* is a true expansion, not a "rules supplement." The only new rules are on the cards themselves, and there are no new card types. I do have some new rules in mind for the game, and you



will be seeing them, but this set wasn't intended to change *Munchkin* at all, or make it any more complex or longer to play -- just to add more cards and more variety.

The Cards

To do that, it was necessary to add cards in the right proportion to avoid changing game balance. So you have additional Super Munchkin and Half-Breed cards, for instance, and some new types of Go Up A Level.

I did add one new race: the Orcs. That seemed like the next logical fantasy race, in spite of the fact that there's already a monster card with orcs on it. 3,872 Orcs, to be precise. I wondered about writing a special rule for the interaction of an Orc Munchkin with the monster orcs, and finally decided, "No, they just try to kill each other, like always."

What Comes Next?

You may have seen the ads for *Star Munchkin*. It is, in fact (big evil grin) in playtest now. *Star Munchkin* will be a stand-alone game with 168 cards. It will, however, be compatible with *Munchkin*. The card backs will be different to make it easy to sort the games out again. That means you'll always know which set the next card is coming from, but that won't make a whole lot of difference in play.

Star Munchkin adds three new races and four new outer-space-type character classes. Basic play is the same, but there are some new card *types* as well.²

And I don't plan to stop there. Another entire *Munchkin* game, of course, is approaching playtest at our Austin dungeon. I'm not telling the theme yet, but if you want another hint . . .³

And of course, our other *Munchkin* followup is the *Munchkin d20* series. It seemed like a match made in heaven . . . or someplace. Andrew Hackard is doing the heavy lifting on that project. But I'm helping. That's what I call it, anyway . . .

But we're having far too much fun to quit. See you in Munchkintown!

* * *

¹ Though I saw an interesting suggestion in the *Munchkin* group on [Yahoo!](#) . . . use the blank cards to indicate "nothing." You open the door and find . . . nothing. You search the room and find . . . nothing. The monster's treasure was . . . nothing. Now personally I don't intend to do that, because to me the essence of munchkin adventure is that you *always* find something. But it's a valid option.

² Want a hint? Okay, here's a hint: Sidekicks.

³ If you want another hint, you can wait a while; I'm really not telling.

The Venerable Bede

"The Father of English History"

by Ryan Patrick Crisp

Total Points: 105

Age 35; 5'8", 140 lbs; thin of body and face, light brown hair (tonsured), blue eyes, small patches of facial hair

Attributes: ST 9 [-10], DX 10 [0], IQ 16 [80], HT 8 [-20].

Move: 4 **Speed:** 4.5

Advantages: Reputation +2 (Most churchmen in British Isles, some Northumbrian nobles) [3], Charisma +1 [5], Clerical Investment [5], Common Sense [10], Literacy [10], Mathematical Ability [10], Patron (monastery of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow) [25], Strong Will-3 [12].

Disadvantages: Dead Broke [-25]; Reputation -1 (those who disagree with his views) [-1]; Fanaticism (Roman Catholicism) [-15]; Vow (monastic) [-15].

Quirks: Likes music; really admires Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604); doesn't like to travel far from home.

Skills: Calligraphy-12 [8]; Poetry-14 [1/2]; Singing-10 [1]; Area Knowledge (Monastery of Sts. Peter and Paul at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow)-15 [1/2]; Law (Canon)-13 [1/2]; Astrology (TL3)-13 [1/2]; History (TL3)-16 [4]; Literature (TL3)-18 [8]; Mathematics-14 [1]; Theology (Roman Catholicism)-18 [8]; Teaching-16 [2].

Languages: Anglo-Saxon (native)-16 [0]; Latin-16 [2]; Greek-12 [1/2].

Notes

The life of a monk does not lend itself towards health and strength: constant fasting, little sleep, and a rather sedentary life (when even your work is writing or copying manuscripts). What Bede lacked in physical abilities, however, he made up for with his keen mind.

The disadvantage of Dead Broke (a monk has no possessions) is balanced by the Patron (the monastery, which could even be extended to include the Catholic hierarchy in general). Living the life of a monk requires a strong will. Bede has a good reputation among most churchmen in England, and even beyond, but he has his own opinions and agenda, with which not everyone agrees, and those people would react negatively towards him. Bede shows himself, through his writings and interests, to have been quite talented when it comes to mathematics. His fanaticism for the Roman Catholic church comes out in his historical writings, where one of his main purposes is to show the triumph of the customs and practices of the Roman Church over the customs and practices of the Celtic Church. Bede's far-ranging contacts are not represented above, as they are quite numerous and thus not really feasible to display in *GURPS* terms.

Bede's skills reveal that he is not made for normal adventuring. For most of his skills, it must be remembered that Bede lives in the 8th century, and his deep knowledge of history and literature, for example, is still limited by the knowledge of the time. Thus his great knowledge of literature mainly covers the writings of such well-known Roman authors as Virgil, the Church Fathers, and the Bible. His knowledge of writing and manuscripts is covered by the calligraphy skill. What Bede knows he tries to pass on to his pupils in the monastic school. His knowledge of Greek, though, was a rarity, and he does not seem to have passed that on to many of his students.

Biography

We are actually quite fortunate to have a short autobiography which Bede included at the end of his major historical work: *A History of the English Church and People* (often referred to as the *Ecclesiastical History*). He was born in either 672 or 673, on the lands of the monastery of St. Peter and St. Paul, at Wearmouth-Jarrow in Northumbria (the region of England north of the Humber River), and at the age of seven he was committed to the care of its monks to be educated. He remained there and indeed seldom -- if ever -- left there, until his death on May 25, 735. He became a deacon at the age of 19, and a priest at age 30. He served as a teacher in his monastery for much of his life, and indeed the account of his death has him dictating to a young monk right up to the end.

He was a prolific writer on a variety of topics, and he included in his autobiographical statement a lengthy list of the works which he authored (there are no less than 31 separate works listed). Because of both the quality and quantity of his work, Bede's influence on medieval thought and learning was immense; indeed, after just a single generation, his *Ecclesiastical History* had been spread in (still extant) copies all over western Europe. In fact, copies of his work have been discovered as far away as Leningrad (St. Petersburg). He is also famous for popularizing the *Anno Domini* (BC/AD) dating system through his historical works. The quantity of his output is particularly amazing if you consider that much of his day was spent praying and observing the monastic rule, or teaching in the monastic school. Bede was used as a model by later writers, and his influence went beyond that of just an historian: his writings on orthography, rhetoric, metrics, computation, chronology, and science were used to teach students throughout the Middle Ages. His writings on the Bible were often classed with those of the early church fathers, and he himself would have declared these his most important achievements. But, to modern historians, his most important work was his *Ecclesiastical History*, without which we would know much less about early Anglo-Saxon history.

Bede lived in an era of relative peace and stability. The latter stages of his life mark the beginning of what some have called the Northumbrian Golden Age. Although the stability of the Northumbrian monarchy was beginning to break down near the end of his life, learning and art flourished in this region for much of the 8th century (basically until 793 when the Vikings arrived at the island monastery of Lindisfarne). Northumbria was heavily influenced at this time by Irish art and thinking (and Bede could find a place in a fairly straight-forward Celtic Myth campaign). Bede had contacts far and wide, throughout England, and probably Scotland, Ireland, and Gaul as well. He even had contacts as far away as Rome (Rome was a favorite pilgrimage spot for Anglo-Saxons -- more than one Anglo-Saxon king went on pilgrimage to die there). Among his contacts could also be included some of the kings of Northumbria (such as Ceowulf (r. 729-37), to whom Bede dedicated his *Ecclesiastical History*) and various English bishops (one bishop of York, Egbert, was even his pupil).

Encountered

Monk and Teacher

About the only way PCs might encounter the Venerable Bede is to visit him in his monastery. If they are Anglo-Saxon, or even Irish, monks from the period, it is quite possible that they could have gone to school at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow as a young monk, and been Bede's pupil at the renowned monastic school there. Travelers from all over England, Ireland, and perhaps even Gaul, might stop and spend the night at his monastery on their way to parts elsewhere. PCs of a scholarly bent would definitely want to go and meet the learned monk, but could also maintain some sort of regular long-distant correspondence with him; thus they could serve as one of Bede's far-flung contacts, and Bede could serve as one of their contacts.

The Wise Man of the Mountain

In a lot of ways, the Venerable Bede is like the mythical wise man or sage on the mountain, and heroes could seek him out for answers to their questions -- of course, they'll always find him in the monastery at Jarrow. Given his contacts spread throughout Christendom, it is quite likely that if something important has happened a couple of months earlier, Bede knows about it. Likewise, anyone interested in learning or scholarship in his day would have known of him. His

most obvious role in a game, therefore, is to serve as a mouthpiece for a GM to relay background information, instructions, or clues to players.

His knowledge of the Bible should be considered practically perfect (he wrote treatises on close to a third of the books of the Bible), and he is one of the few men of his day in England, and indeed Western Europe, who could read Greek. . . although he mainly used this knowledge to study the Greek New Testament. Bede also loved music and anyone with musical abilities would be especially welcomed by him to the monastery.

For those with an inclination towards high weirdness or the occult, Bede was an expert in the computus (the skill of calculating the exact date of Easter). He wrote two books on the nature of time, one on the Tabernacle, and a martyrology (a sort of calendar of the feast days for various saints, including information on how they died, and perhaps some of their reported miracles). Thus, while not specifically drawn towards the occult himself, Bede would be an important source of information on the struggle between good and evil, on both the physical and spiritual planes.

Time Travelers

Lost in the Early Middle Ages and need a guidebook? Desperately wishing you had access to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*? If a time traveler were to land in Western Europe between the early 8th century and the 12th century, one of the best (and most available) sources of information would be some of the works of the Venerable Bede. Bede's historical works could serve as a rough guide to find churches and monasteries (and their resident bishops and monks) or pilgrimage sites in England. His works dealing with time and calendars might come in handy for someone who really needs to know the date (in a way that is relatively compatible with modern dates). Monkwearmouth-Jarrow (and later York) had an incredible collection of books, and almost anything (still extant) that the PCs could want might be found there.

Are you a GM who wants to know what people really knew and understood about their world in the 7th and 8th centuries or even beyond? Look no further than Bede! His works include books on science, music, poetry, language, history, and (of course) the Bible. Many of his books have been translated, although many still have not (better brush up on that Latin!).

Non-Historical Use

While Bede seems to mainly fit into a regular historical campaign (Celtic Myth or Time Travel), with a little modification he might fit well into a fantasy campaign. Bede might be cast as a wizard or a cleric, perhaps the head of a school of young wizards or clerics: the learned master, whose knowledge of magic or the gods is unsurpassed in his region. His low point total leaves a lot of room for adding magical abilities and spells.

On an alternate earth, it is possible that Bede was not given to the monastery at age 7 and either followed his father in his profession, or only came to join the monastery later in life. In the first instance, the effect on the medieval world could be quite devastating. Perhaps someone else took up his work, but it is just as likely that the history of early Anglo-Saxon England never gets written, the general acceptance of the *Anno Domini* dating system is pushed back (or perhaps never really adopted), and the various textbooks and treatises which served as core books in medieval education are not available. It is up to the GM to decide how great an effect on later medieval history this could have. A later entry into the monastery leaves him less time to write all that he wrote (depending on how late he finally enters), and again the GM must decide which books get written. His outside experiences could also change the way he wrote his history.

Further Reading

Our main source for the history of 7th century England is Bede's *Ecclesiastic History* (available in several editions), and anyone considering running a campaign in the early Anglo-Saxon period should read this book just to get a feel for what life was like, and who the major players were. Not everything he says in his history is necessarily true, but he

does reflect the general world view of Anglo-Saxon England (especially Northumbria) in the 7th century.

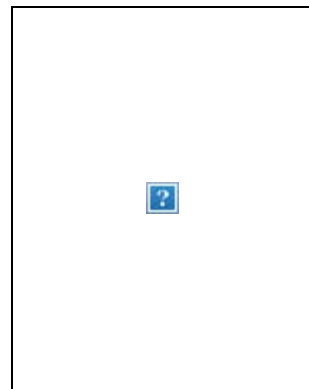
Perhaps a little out of date -- but still quite useful for gamers -- is Peter Hunter Blair's *The World of Bede* (1971), which provides a good background to the history of Bede's day as well as some specific details about the life of a monk or a scholar in this period.

Pyramid Review

Enter the Zombie (for All Flesh Must Be Eaten RPG)

Published by [Eden Studios](#)

Written by Al Bruno III, Richard Dakan and Jack Emmert with Colin Chapman, Derek Guder and Gerry Saracco Illustrated by Storn Cook, C. Brent Ferguson, D W Gross, Francis Hogan, Matt Morrow, Christopher Shy and George Vasilakos



7.5" by 9.5" 176-page perfect bound softback; \$20

In *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, Eden Studios explored the nature of the zombie in all of its shambling glory. It enabled the Zombie Master (as the GM is known in *AFMBE*) to design his own muscle munching members of the walking dead and then pit them against the players in some "last days of humanity . . ." Beyond the basic concept, the game came with over ten "Deadworlds" that served to show how much could be done with the basic zombie in various different settings. Yet "The Zombie Survival Horror Roleplaying Game" possessed one inherent limitation: there was still only so much mileage to be made of the encroaching apocalypse/post-apocalypse survival type of game. Games not only tended to be rather finite in length, but also rather depressing in nature, especially in the face of an endless swathe of zombies . . .

Thus every Zombie Master, or ZM, will be pleased to hear that Eden has released the much-anticipated second supplement for *AFMBE*. *Enter the Zombie* revives the genre by combining it with another . . . namely that of Hong Kong cinema. Not only does this book present new, tougher martial arts for Eden Studios' Unisystem game engine -- more so than in their *Witchcraft RPG* -- it also provides rules for players to build, design and play zombies as their characters.

In *AFMBE*, players could select and build characters based upon one of three types: Norm, Survivor, and Inspired. *Enter the Zombie* suggests that to get the most out of its contents, these three should be ignored in favour of just two new types: the Martial Artist and the Shooter. Character creation is the same as in *AFMBE*, but when the Martial Arts skill is purchased, each level of skill also provides points to be spent on maneuvers. These are generic types of martial arts moves -- such as Back Kick, Jab, Judo Throw, and Roll With Blow -- rather than anything specific to a school of martial arts. The author has made no attempt to quantify the many schools possible, as this would consume no small amount of space. Instead, players and the ZM are encouraged to create their own, although they could do no worse than peruse *GURPS Martial Arts* for further information.

Should either Martial Artist or Shooter purchase the "Gifted" Quality, they gain access to a whole range of Special Chi Techniques that essentially allow characters to do all of the cool things they have seen in *Hard Boiled* or *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. These include Acrobatic Shooting, Catch Bullets, Flying, Healing Touch and Two-Fist Firing, among others. Although every character possesses a certain amount of Essence, it is likely that they will need more, as each Chi Technique costs a certain amount to use per turn. Overall, both new Character Types come out as quite tough, which is not surprising, given the cinematic nature of the genre they are modelling . . .

As an alternative to either the Martial Artist or Shooter -- and if the ZM allows it -- players can take zombies as their characters. But zombie PCs in *Enter the Zombie* are not members of the shuffling corpse cortege we know and love from *AFMBE*, but quick as a flash, sharp-shooting, butt-kicking, combat-loving cadavers. In other words, zombies can also be Martial Artists or Shooters, even though they are dead! Zombie PCs must take the Long Term Memory and Problem Solving Aspects from the "Anatomy of a Zombie" chapter in the main rulebook, plus whatever zombie

aspects the ZM has mandated for their chosen setting.

Zombie character creation is little different to that of normal characters, but they have a greater flexibility in where they can assign their points, unlike other characters under the Unisystem. Further, and while they also have access to the Special Chi Techniques, they have their own Aspects to choose from as well. These include the Burrowing Finger, which allows a zombie to send their index finger burrowing into an opponent's flesh to find their weak spot; the Entrail Whip, or using the intestines to whip or entangle an opponent; Hand-Gun, concealing a stripped down pistol within the hand; Shuriken Nails -- handy projectiles always at a zombie's fingertips; and the Torso Turret, for when a zombie just wants to track a moving opponent with ease, they just plant their legs firmly and quite painlessly swivel their body through 360°! There are enough of these zombie Aspects to keep every player happy; combined with the Martial Arts rules, the zombie PC really is tough enough to take on an ordinary Martial Artist.

The rest of *Enter the Zombie* presents four Hong Kong cinema-inspired "settings" as opposed to the various Deadworlds in *AFMBE*. These settings replace the overwhelming sense of doom to be found in a Deadworld with a strong air of desperation. This is done by scaling back the method of making more zombies, whether artificially or by their own spreading the love. Players will find -- probably much to their dismay -- that their zombie characters cannot just make new undead friends, whether from NPCs or the other cast members. As with the main rulebook, each setting is fully described and comes with two chunky scenario outlines and four fully stated characters to use.

[SPOILER ALERT]

"Hard Boiled Corpses" is the first setting, inspired by both John Woo and George Romero. Set in post-handover Hong Kong, the city has of late been swept by a new drug known as White Thunder, which is more addictive and lethal than heroin. In the wake of the drug, there has been a wave of crime committed by almost unstoppable junkies. Are they zombies hooked on White Thunder or junkies in body armor? Cast members can be police officers or triad members assigned to track down the source of the drug, both unaware of the zombie problem. Alternatively, they can begin play as zombie junkies desperate for their next fix. The first option will be a gun bunny's dream, while the second should be fun for all the players as they discover their unique zombie abilities.

The second setting does not so much take a leaf off John Carpenter's *Big Trouble in Little China* as steal the whole tree and make a run for it. "Flesh Eaters in Little China" is set in San Francisco and pits the cast members against a wealthy philanthropist, businessman and crime lord, who just happens to be a five-thousand-year-old Chinese sorcerer. This setting includes basic rules for his sorcery in play (though ZMs are encouraged to check out *Witchcraft* should they want more information), a guide to his underground room shifting palace and descriptions of the various street gangs and martial arts schools found in the area. The first scenario suggests that the cast members be somewhat-tough tourists caught up in the middle of the war between the sorcerer and the gangs -- stolen truck and green-eyed princess both optional, of course. The second has them cast as members of one of the gangs caught up the war and knowing just a little more than the tourists in the first, but not much.

"Once Upon a Corpse in China" takes the cast back into the past and an age of competing martial arts schools and ancient tradition. One of the schools in the area has been attacked and destroyed by some unknown force. The players can be the magistrate and members of his entourage sent to investigate the disturbances in the area, or actually be the cause themselves. Of the four settings in *Enter the Zombie*, this one seemed the least attention-grabbing, and it's questionable whether or not the ZM or the players will get as much fun out of it.

Fans of beat 'em ups will enjoy "Undead Combat", the fourth setting that is clearly inspired by the *Mortal Kombat* games and films. Every twenty-five years, millennially ancient Persian Magi bring their armies of the dead together to fight in a tournament. Zombies, you see, need to consume an undead soul once every twenty-five years or they are in danger of giving into the hunger and going on the rampage until sated. Their Tournament of Souls also stops the Magi wasting their zombie assets in wars against each other. This year's tournament is different, because the host has invited some the world's best "mortal" martial artists. Players can take these as their characters, or even compete as zombies through the fight. Alternatively, they might be members of the Magi armies who are dissatisfied with their lot and want to set out on their own . . . The setting for "Undead Kombat" is an island in the Malay Archipelago, now built with several different types of arenas in which to stage the fights. Every fight is to the death; should a mortal actually

win, guess what makes the best kind of zombie in this setting . . . ?

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Enter the Zombie is done in the same style and layout as *AFMBE*. This does mean that not all of the art is as good as the rest, but overall this is nice-looking book. The color fiction is also an enjoyable and unpretentious read, and it could form the basis for a setting of its own, should the ZM be so minded. One gripe readers may have is that the book is gives over eight pages to self-advertising other Eden Games. Although not necessarily objectionable in principle, perhaps they could have been cut in favor of actually illustrating the martial arts weapons described in the text.

It should be pointed out that although *Enter the Zombie* describes itself as "A Hong Kong Action Theatre Sourcebook," it is not actually a sourcebook for that game, and the only stats and rules in the book pertain to *AFMBE*. Yet if you happen to own either the *Hong Kong Action Theatre* or *Feng Shui RPGs*, there is absolutely nothing to stop you using *Enter the Zombie* for inspiration . . . or just for the pilfering of its ideas and settings; the settings would work well under either game.

Enter the Zombie is an excellent supplement to buy, not just for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, but also for any game based on Hong Kong cinema. It showcases how well zombies can be made to work under another genre, and both Zombie Master and the players should get a kick out of actually playing a zombie. Here's hoping that Eden Studios' other planned genre books -- *Pulp Zombies* and *A Fistful of Zombies* -- are just as good and just as fun.

--Matthew Pook

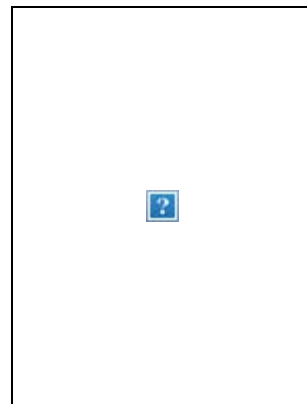
Pyramid Review

Marvel Recharge CCG

Published by [Marvel Entertainment Group Inc.](#)

Designed by Bill Jemas

Starter Deck: 52 cards, 20 counter chips, rulebook, \$7.99; Booster Pack: 8 cards, \$1.49



First, there was *Overpower*, and it was good. Well, no it wasn't, but it was one of very few superhero collectible card games released during the CCG-crazed 90s so we played it anyway. While *Overpower* featured characters from many comic universes, such as DC and Marvel, it was plagued by uneven art, unbalanced expansions, and less-than-stellar support. By the end of last century it had floundered and further development for it was scrapped.

The new century begins with a new superhero collectible card game called *Marvel Recharge*. Unlike *Overpower*, it contains characters from only the Marvel Universe, features great art, contains simple rules, and has a theme that hangs looser than a hoop skirt on a fashion model.

Since this is a CCG, the complete *Recharge* card set contains 250 cards of varying rarity. Some cards are foil cards, and rare cards are often more powerful than the common cards. In the tournament version of the game, however, a deck may contain only one copy of each card. Thus the advantage of spending vast amounts of money on the game is mitigated.

In *Recharge*, each player has a deck of Hero cards, Power cards, and Teamwork cards. Each card has a point value that determines its strength in a fight. Cards also have a color border on their right and left sides. This determines which cards may be played together in a fight, as colors must match. The border also has symbols, so color-blind players should be able to determine which color is which. Finally, some cards have special instructions that break the rules or give the card extra power in certain situations.

The rules are easy to learn, although they vary a bit depending on whether you are playing with just a starter deck, playing a tournament game with customized decks, or playing with more than two people. There are even rules for playing with a single booster pack.

Each player begins a tournament game with a customized deck of any size, along with 25 counters valued between one and five. These counters must add up to a value between 50 and 65 points and are used to wager on battles during the game. The winner of a battle wins the wagered counters, and the first player to win 70 points wins the game.

Players begin with only one card in their hands. On a player's turn, she draws one card and chooses whether or not to initiate a fight. To start a battle, the attacker lays one Hero card on the table and wagers a single counter. The defender draws one card and decides if he wishes to participate in the battle or simply concede and let the attacker win the wagered counter without a challenge.

If the player chooses to defend, he also lays down a Hero card. He can also play a Power card, assuming the color borders match on both cards, to increase his total point strength. He can play a Teamwork cards that matches color which allows him to bring another Hero card into the battle. He must play enough cards to exceed his attacker's point strength. He also has the option of wagering one of his counters.

The attacker now has a chance to play additional cards to increase her points. If the defender wagered a counter, she

can wager another as well. The attacker and defender alternate playing cards and wagering counters until the losing player can not play enough cards to exceed his opponent's point strength.

The winner of the battle takes all of the wagered counters and adds them to her victory pile, regardless of who actually bet them. Players discard all cards played during the fight. Then they must discard and draw so they have three cards in their hands. The loser of the last fight goes first in the next turn, draws a card, and determines if he wishes to attack. This continues until someone wins 70 points' worth of counters, or until someone runs completely out of cards.

Marvel Recharge is an odd CCG in that it feels more like a traditional card game than a typical collectible game. Also, its theme of superhero and supervillian battles has little to do with the actual game play. All that really matters is the point value and color borders of the cards. That your Rhino Hero card is teamed up with the Sentinels and Professor X is perfectly legal although it makes little sense to comic book readers.

Still, **Recharge** has much to recommend it. Although the rules are straightforward -- some critics on the Internet believe the game is too simple -- playing the game takes quite a bit of thought. Players must choose their battles wisely so as to not waste powerful cards. They must judge the worth of a fight to decide if they want to defend, or simply concede and save cards for higher counters later. At the same time, players can not hoard cards looking for the ultimate hand because they discard down to three after every fight.

The wagering mechanic is a great addition as well. It modifies the worth of each battle so players have to determine how many cards they should use for each fight. It also allows for the kind of bluffing you would expect in a good Poker game.

With great art, fun mechanics, and simple rules, **Marvel Recharge** stands out in the crowded CCG market. Granted, it does not create the feeling of a comic book story, and players may miss the satisfaction of building up a character and watching it win many battles, however it still manages to be fun and somewhat original.

--Brad Weier

Pyramid Review

Spycraft RPG (for d20)

Published by [Alderac Entertainment Group, Inc.](#)

By Patrick Kapera and Kevin Wilson

Art by Storn Cook, Jonathan Hunt, A. Bleys Ingram, Garry McKee, Richard Pollard, Mike Sellers, Ethan Slayton, Dan Smith, Paul H. Way, and Jeff Wright

288 pages, hardbound, black and white; \$34.95

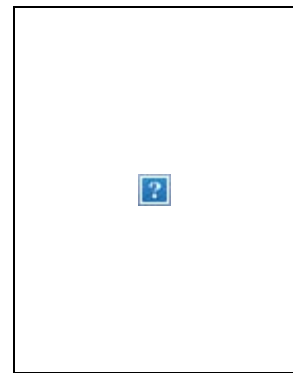
Good evening, agent Gamesman. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is as follows:

Your cover will be that of an ordinary roleplayer in search of new and exciting material for a weekly social gaming event. Following this briefing, you should proceed immediately to the pickup point; the agency's offices use the front of a friendly local game store.

A training manual for use in educating new agents has surfaced, and Control requests that you intercept a copy. A team known only as Alderac Entertainment Group, Inc. designed this manual for use in conjunction with the *d20* system, an insidious mechanism that seems to be permeating every level of our profession. The project is codenamed [Spycraft](#).

Intelligence operatives have identified two moles at AEG, Patrick Kapera and Kevin Wilson, experienced agents who authored the project. They have leaked information about the work to members of the community at large and advertised their desire for monetary compensation. It is clear these men have piercing insights into every level of the world of espionage, and have included this information in their work. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **Weapons and Equipment:** Although generic in nature, Kapera and Wilson's primer on the various munitions available covers a wide range of applications. No doubt once they have piqued the interest of potential buyers, they will offer additional material in later volumes to the highest bidder. They also provide extensive notes on some of our industry's best-kept technological secrets, from vehicular upgrades to covert equipment to super-science espionage gadgetry unavailable to local law enforcement precincts.
- **Feats:** Agents with the right expertise know that certain deeds are endemic to our exploits. Trained as we are with vehicles, weaponry, and team leadership skills, we know maneuvers and tricks of the trade that the average civilian is unfamiliar with. The authors, probably in an effort to entice hopeful new recruits, do nothing to dispel the idealized notion that spies can drive cars on two wheels, pass guards silently at a dead run, change clips in a heartbeat, and impersonate anyone from the janitor to the prime minister. Clearly they know how to seduce bright-eyed initiates.
- **Skills:** Much like weapons, the skills presented are fairly expansive, condensing the complex execution our work demands to a few key elements that are applicable to a wide variety of situations. Rather than intimidate the incoming cadet with the full body of knowledge with which he must become familiar, the project overseers have chosen to simplify the material to a broader, more cinematically appealing sampling.
- **Chases:** Pursuits are as much a part of our efforts as investigations, and an entire chapter of the handbook is devoted to the resolution of same. Everything from foot pursuits to high-tech aerial dogfights are described in this primer, which reduces the theoretical participants to predator and prey and boils down the most common



tactics used by both sides during these very dangerous exercises into an abstracted exercise easily absorbed by the freshman spy.

- **Classified Diagrams:** Many of the practices delineated in this guide are clearly illustrated. Diagrams of tactics and training maneuvers are crisply presented, and wholly gratuitous artists' renderings of agents in action are used to skillfully and shamelessly glorify the jet-setting life of an international spy.

In addition, the manual is an attempt to condition newcomers to the Great Game. It is written to fully submerge the reader in the material, and only after a trainee has been lured by the fanciful graphics and pleasant presentation does he realize how comprehensive a work this is. Tantalizing glimpses into the job of "Game Control" suggest AEG has double agents working in that section, and it attempts to pass its clandestine knowledge of these skills to the newbie and the veteran agent alike. Thanks to our efforts, similar codices have failed to provide the same thorough level of detail concerning investigations, technology, mission types, and more, which demands we scrutinize this work with a suspicious eye.

Kapera and Wilson are obviously well versed on all fronts of the covert war, providing detailed -- some readers might say too detailed -- information. Control believes that, rather than liquidate these men, our agenda would be better served by cultivating a relationship with them and their talented staff, that we may benefit from their research before our competitors do.

Time is of the essence. You may find yourself in contention with other agencies intent on procuring this information, and while our agency has its own way of accomplishing its goals, we have it on good authority that AEG operatives will be building on the data in the *Spycraft* manual with the *Shadowforce Archer Worldbook* to delve deeper into the workings of that organization. We are certain other exposes are forthcoming.

As always, if you are caught or captured, the Secretary will disavow any and all knowledge of your actions. This message will self-destruct in five seconds.

--Andy Vetromile

If The Secretary of Defense Falls From An Empty Room, Does It Make A Sound?

"This fall I think you're riding for -- it's a special kind of fall, a horrible kind. The man falling isn't permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just keeps falling and falling. . . . I don't want to scare you, but I can very clearly see you dying nobly, one way or another, for some highly unworthy cause."

-- Mr. Antolini, in *The Catcher in the Rye*, by J.D. Salinger

If an imaginary conspiracy kills someone, is it still an imaginary conspiracy? If a real conspiracy plans a suicide, is it a murder? These are just some of the questions left dangling from the sixteenth floor window of Bethesda Naval Hospital, surely one of the most death-haunted fanes in America's secret geometry. The death of James Forrestal, the first Secretary of Defense, is bisociation as tragedy, as irony, as paradox -- and, just possibly, as murder weapon. This is where Forrestal cashed in. This is the window ledge leading to Outside. Let's take the next step.

"Well, I may have been in the position of not being able to see the forest for the trees because I was seeing him six, eight, ten, twelve times a day and both in and out of the office. A lot of his friends have said since his death, 'Oh, we saw it coming,' and, 'We knew this and we knew that.' The only thing that I knew was that he was terribly tired, terribly overworked, spending frequently literally sixteen hours and eighteen hours a day trying to administer an impossible mechanism, worrying about the fact that a lot of it was of his own creation."

-- oral testimony of Marx Leva, special assistant to Secretary Forrestal

James Vincent Forrestal was the son of an immigrant Irish bricklayer, and a combat pilot in World War One. When World War Two loomed, he left his job with the Wall Street firm of Dillon, Read and became FDR's Undersecretary of the Navy, rising to Secretary of the Navy in 1944. His Wall Street contacts and financial acumen helped build a stable, productive, and surprisingly efficient military procurement program for the war effort. In 1947, when President Truman reorganized the service departments under the newly-named Department of Defense, Forrestal became the first Secretary of Defense and immediately ran into a brick wall.

President Truman wanted to balance the budget, reorganize and unify the military, and contain Communism -- a nearly impossible task even for someone of Forrestal's talents. Forrestal rapidly made enemies in the new climate of cutbacks and controls, chief among them Stuart Symington, the Secretary of the Air Force. Forrestal began going around the bureaucracy, talking with Republican leaders about his programs -- and, quite possibly, feeling them out for a job with the Dewey administration everyone in 1948 expected. When Truman won, Forrestal lost the President's confidence, and added Attorney General Thomas Clark to his list of opponents. Outside government, his reflexive (even strident) anti-Communism made liberal columnist and broadcaster Drew Pearson a personal foe as well.

Pearson's campaign of leaks and innuendo, Clark's harassment, and Symington's obstructionism rapidly hemmed Forrestal in. He became convinced of enemies in all levels of government, complaining of being followed by "foreign-looking men" and of a "Communist or Zionist" plot against him. Secret Service chief U.E. Baughman reported to Truman that Forrestal was suffering "a total psychotic breakdown." Truman replaced Forrestal at Defense with Louis Johnson in a public ceremony on March 28, 1949. Symington insisted on riding back to the Pentagon with Forrestal that afternoon -- what they said in that closed car has never been made public. When Forrestal was discovered later that evening, he would only repeat the words "You are a loyal fellow" over and over. He had suffered a complete nervous breakdown.

*"Better to die, and sleep,
The never-waking sleep, than linger on,
And dare to live, when the soul's life is gone."*

-- Sophocles, *Ajax* (from the poem Forrestal was copying on the night of his death)

Friends flew Forrestal to Florida to recover, but he continued to have nightmares of suicide and being followed. He was finally placed in Bethesda Naval Hospital, in the VIP suite on the 16th floor, with a diagnosis of "involutional

melancholia," essentially serious clinical depression. The wall of government secrecy closed in; Forrestal's close friend, Monsignor Maurice Sheehy, was denied permission to see him, and even his brother Henry had to threaten to go to the press to be allowed in at all. Isolated and alone, Forrestal brooded and read, until the morning of May 22, 1949. His guard, a navy corpsman named Robert Wayne Harrison, saw him on a routine 15-minute check at 1:45 a.m., apparently copying the chorus of *Salamis* out of Sophocles' tragedy *Ajax*. He got as far as the word "nightingale." During the next fifteen minutes, according to the coroner's report, Forrestal walked next door to the kitchenette, knotted his bathrobe sash around his neck, tied the other end to the radiator, opened a screen window, and stepped out. The sash came untied, and Forrestal plunged to his death, striking the building and landing on a third-floor roof.

"Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not following you."

-- Delmore Schwartz

Here, of course, is where irony compounds tragedy. Forrestal had good reason to suspect a conspiracy against him; the historical record amply demonstrates that much. The Venona intercepts, among other recent revelations, document a thriving Soviet spy ring within the Truman administration -- one that would hardly be above setting watchdogs on Truman's most devoted anti-Communist cabinet member. Furthermore, his aides (and possibly Forrestal himself) *were* under surveillance by Israeli secret agents concerned, with good reason, that Forrestal was attempting to end American support for Zionism. Most of the reports of Forrestal's mounting paranoia come either from Drew Pearson (hardly an objective source) or from Secret Service chief Baughman -- who, it transpires, was in fact *also* having Forrestal followed. What better cover for your own surveillance than to smear your target as suffering from paranoid delusions?

Among Forrestal's "delusions" was the prediction that the U.S. would be at war with Communism within a year (which came true in Korea in 1950), and that the Soviet Union would attempt to expand its influence in the Third World, that guerrilla warfare could pose a serious challenge for American forces, and that American support for Israel would anger the Arab states and endanger our oil supply. In short, a verdict of delusional psychosis must remain not proven, at least from the evidence at hand. In fact, at the time of his death, the doctors at Bethesda apparently believed him sane enough to take him off anti-depressants (in retrospect, probably not a good idea) and to prepare to release him the next day to his brother Henry.

"Father Sheehy had reason to suspect murder. When he arrived at Bethesda Naval Hospital after learning of Forrestal's death, an experienced-looking hospital corpsman approached him through the crowd. In a low, tense voice he said: 'Father, you know Mr. Forrestal didn't kill himself, don't you?' Before Sheehy could respond or ask his name, others in the crowd pressed close, and the man quickly departed."

-- Richard Dolan, "The Death of James Forrestal"

But the day Henry was to remove Forrestal from Bethesday was the day Forrestal was permanently removed. The details of that removal niggle even today. A former Navy man couldn't knot a bathrobe sash to a radiator, but could "tightly knot" that same sash around his own neck? Why did the coroner refuse to determine whether strangulation had occurred prior to death? Why try hanging himself at all, if the window screen came off that easily -- why not just jump? What did the scuffle marks on the window ledge mean -- were they "hesitation marks" -- or the signs of a struggle against a murderous intruder? In fact, we only have the guard's testimony (and he a new man, added at the last minute after Forrestal's regular guard got drunk and went AWOL the night before) that Forrestal copied out the poem that night rather than on some other occasion.

Coming so soon after Czechoslovakian Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk's eerily similar "suicide" from a high window in 1948, many observers on the scene fingered the obvious suspect: the KGB. Joseph McCarthy (who also died suddenly, although admittedly of hepatitis, at Bethesda) regularly referred to Forrestal's death as a "murder," daintily leaving the question open of whether the Commies "hounded Forrestal to his death" or had him "thrown . . . from that sixteenth-story window." (Nixon, no stranger to paranoia, refused to enter Bethesda for treatment after resigning from the Presidency.) Our modern-day conspiracy theorists draw similar parallels to the mysterious defenestrations of CIA biochemist Frank Olson (who fell out of a hotel window in 1953 after -- and this is the kindest possible construction of events -- a CIA hazing prank with LSD went wrong) and Soviet agent (and former State Department official -- and friend of Drew Pearson) Lawrence Duggan, who also fell from a sixteenth-floor window above Fifth Avenue in New York.

"OPERATION MAJESTIC-12 is a TOP SECRET Research and Development/Intelligence operation responsible directly and only to the President of the United States. Operations of the project are carried out under control of the Majestic-12 (Majic-12) Group which was established by special classified executive order of President Truman on 24 September, 1947, upon recommendation by Dr. Vannevar Bush and Secretary James Forrestal."

-- "Operation MAJESTIC-12 Preliminary Briefing for President-Elect Eisenhower," attributed to Adm. Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter

But the CIA, or even the KGB, aren't the most shadowy suspects available to us. As Secretary of the Navy, Forrestal had access to all top-level military secrets, including the atomic test program -- and other secret developments in New Mexico. Forrestal's diaries (released in edited form in 1951 after spending two years locked up in the White House) have no entries whatsoever from July 3 to July 13, 1947 -- the period of the Roswell crash. Did Forrestal travel to New Mexico to meet the aliens? Was this the beginning of "the most terrifying hallucinations and horrifying delusions" he suffered? The "Majestic documents" clearly identify Forrestal as a member (in fact, as the co-founder) of Majestic-12 -- did his increasing instability endanger the project? Was he threatening to blow the gaff, or was his personal communion with the entities threatening for a different reason? Did MJ-12 deem "the untimely death of Secretary Forrestal . . . necessary and regrettable," as Annex C to the Majestic documents indicates? Did they send the (traditionally "foreign-looking") Men In Black to do the job, or subcontract it to the ONI's Project CHATTER (a mind-control project that became MK-ULTRA -- and killed Frank Olson)?

Or was Forrestal a casualty of World War II's occult struggle? Forrestal was "MJ-3" (the third of the Twelve), and killed on the first day of Gemini (the third of the twelve signs of the zodiac). That day, that degree, of Gemini, corresponds to the trachea -- hence the (ceremonial?) strangulation. Was Forrestal's thirteen-story (!) fall the Fall from the Tower of the Tarot -- a card also known as the Hospital? If an occult branch of the [Antarctic Space Nazis](#) killed Forrestal, it must have tickled their sense of irony to throw the man responsible for Operation High Jump (Admiral Byrd's assault on the Nazis' Antarctic refuge) out of a window. Did his killers send another message as well, hidden in the poem found in his room? During the war, there are indications that Forrestal may have worked with future CIA founder Allen Dulles on the attempt to remove Hitler and replace him with an anti-Communist general allied to the West, thus transforming WWII into an anti-Communist crusade. One of Dulles' key contacts was the leader of a Ukrainian nationalist army -- the Nightingale Battalion. Was the word "nightingale" Forrestal's last message to the world -- or that of his killers, the CIA-Majestic ritual murder team of MIBs working for the Antarctic Space Nazis? Why not believe it? It only takes a leap of faith.

Toybox Tribes

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Digital Photos by [Virago Designs](#)

(**NOTE:** *Some assembly **definitely** required . . .* This *Campaign in a Box* is experimental: in it, a GM can generate several different settings from a single concept. The main body text of the article holds the "truisms" of the core setting, while sidebars include different options to implement.)

Genre: (Fantasy or Science Fiction) and/or Horror

Style: Action, Intrigue

Themes: Revelation, Survival

Campaign Setting and Background Information

A life-taking wasteland surrounds three kingdoms: the Queen's Realm, the Desert of Glass, and the Clans' Land. The two guardians of the Three Worlds -- whether they were gods, aliens, or something else -- have gone away, leaving their people to fend for themselves, free to make their own destiny.

(What do living toys do when no one is there to play with them? Evolve a culture. Bound to three rooms, these playthings must make the best of their situation.)



What Everybody Knows

Of Other Worlds

Inhabitants of both the Queen's Realm and the Clans' Lands know of the existence of the Desert of Glass, but discount legends of the other kingdom, considering them wild travelers' tales. Some say the god(s) laid down

OPTIONS: Changing the Map and the Non-Toy Game

If the inhabitants of the Three Worlds do not *realize* they are toys, or to port this setting to a

restrictions about going to another world; others claim that even if another world existed, people probably couldn't survive there: the life would be ripped out of them, just as it is when one passes Outside of the Universe (see below). Still, the Gates (one to Outside, and one to the Desert) stand as a testimony to other places. Very small Three Worlders -- especially Plush and Beasts -- can slide through the crack under a Gate into another world. Opening a Gate is a difficult job, requiring good light and a number of Three Worlders acting in concert . . . a task not taken lightly.

Day & Night

There is a cycle of day and night as light streams in through the Great Squares. Given the position of the Great Squares, the Queen's Realm has a regular brightening and fading of light (as the Real World sun transits). However, the Desert of Glass and the Clans' Lands experience a longer, gradual morning, followed by an intense and short afternoon (since their Great Squares face the west). Indeed, the Clans' Lands are the best lit, since they have three Great Squares.

Outside the Universe

The red doors on the map -- "The Portals to Outside the Universe" -- open up into a vast hallway. Three Worlders shy away from them, for once one passes through to Outside, they fall down lifeless. If dragged back Inside, they will recover after a day (unless *OPTION: Scarce Resources* is being used, see below) with no memory of the experience. The floor of Outside is littered with the never-rotting corpses of those too far away (or too disliked by their companions) to be rescued. Some Three Worlders who have climbed the skies to the Great Squares have looked out on a different Outside, at once strangely familiar but also bizarre. Reports vary tremendously -- sometimes all is covered with ice (or ash, or vegetation, or darkness), sometimes all is aflame or drowned in water, and sometimes the Outside looks like a twisted version of the World.

Eating, Drinking, & Sleeping

While Three Worlders have no need to eat or drink, they do have a slight dependence on energy (see *What Everybody Doesn't Know* and the *OPTION: Scarce Resources* sidebar for a further discussion of energy) and water. Three Worlders restore their energy, (used to survive, move, and activate special powers or accessories) by sleeping at least 8 hours per 24-hour period.

Water is a valuable commodity: scant everywhere outside of the Desert of Glass (which has a wealth of standing water as well as access to more), it's useful for cleaning and purifying things. Inhabitants of the Queen's Realm view it as a sacred sign of rulership; the population of the Clans' Lands needs it to properly utilize the Herds (see each World below for further details).

Living & Dying

Three Worlders can generally take substantial physical damage before temporarily or permanently deactivating.

- *Injury/Dismemberment*: Three Worlders do not need to breathe, and cannot drown or be suffocated. They do not bleed, but are weakened by limb- or stuffing-loss. They survive impairment regularly, even if all limbs -- and in rare cases, the torso -- fall off or are completely emptied of stuffing. Clans' Landers carry True Weapons (see below, *Weapons & Accessories*) that "numb" the struck area of the target. It takes

non-toy game, the map of the bedrooms and bath can be reinterpreted into a traditional geographic or political map. For example, the doors and walls become mystic fogs sheltering each land from its neighbors, the vast gulfs of space between three planets, or geographic features like rivers or mountain ranges. The dressers and bookcases become lonely peaks; the beds, mesas or highlands; the carpets, lush plains; the bathtub and sink, large inland lakes; and the toilet, a dormant volcano. (Remember to insert some forests, rivers, and streams.) The toys could then be humans, monsters, and animals as necessary. *Voila!* Instant non-toy setting!

OPTION: Scarce Resources

When this option is in force, the power field that allows Three Worlders to function is damaged. (For Fantasy, this means that the enchantments on the Worlds weaken at night, and

approximately 3 hits for Clans' Landers to totally incapacitate each other; functionality is regained at a rate of 2 hours per hit taken. So if Guy Jozef hits a Trooper in the arm, the Trooper regains the use of his arm after 2 hours; if Guy shoots the Trooper in the head twice, the Trooper is unconscious for 4 hours. The effect of Clans' Landers' True Weapons on Queen's Realmers or Glass Desert Dwellers is unknown.

- *Healing*: Three Worlders are "healed" by physically repairing/reassembling/reattaching/restuffing their bits and pieces, then waiting two hours. Functionality is restored: no fuss, no muss. However, repairs may not look pretty, and purely cosmetic or surface damage -- scars, scratches, dings, dents -- won't heal at all. In addition, Three Worlders can integrate "non-original" parts and pieces in the healing process. If Prince Kenneth lost an arm while fighting The Boneless Thing in the Desert of Glass, he could get a replacement (female) arm from one of the Ladies (or more likely, one of the Ladies' servitors) vying for his heart. The female arm would function exactly as his original arm did, but would look very strange, and his shirts wouldn't fit correctly. The seat of a Three Worlder's soul or personality resides in their head.
- *Death/Deactivation*: Massive physical damage to the head or becoming trapped Outside leads to death or deactivation. While a Three Worlder dragged back inside one of the Three Worlds may return to life, a smashed Three Worlder is gone forever.

must recharge; for Science Fiction, this means that the storage batteries of the house are damaged, and power is only provided directly when the solar cells are active.) Three Worlders can only operate during daylight hours, are weakened on stormy or overcast days, and become unconscious and immobile during the night. Healing takes three times as long, unless subsidized by taking energy from other Three Worlders (usually enemies, Plush, or from the Herds). Wounded to incapacitation or otherwise lifeless Three Worlders will not reactivate without an infusion of energy. GMs, see *OPTION: Horror* for more information.

The Three Worlds

Below are brief sketches of the Three Worlds, their geography and history.

The Queen's Realm

(Known as "the Land of Ogres" in the Clans' Lands.) The sky is a rosy pink and the grass is a pastel green; the geographical features of this World abound in those colors, along with whites, yellows, and reds.

- *The Fashdol Tribe*: Queen Caw rules with an iron fist over her people -- the Fashdol Tribe -- and the conquered beasts of the Plush Tribe. Today, all kowtow to her, not just because of her fearsome physical prowess, but also due to her unique spiritual ability: she can drink and release water, which no other Three Worlder can do. Under her aegis, the Fashdol have turned inward, to climb the heights and plumb the depths of high melodrama, to jockey for social/romantic position through intrigue, and to abuse their Plush slaves . . . if possible, to do all three at once.

Most machinations center on Prince Kenneth, the "son" of Queen Caw. Each of the Ladies of the Realm plot and plan to become (or remain) his paramour, a position of power just below the Queen's own. "She who has the Prince's heart has the Queen's ear," or so the proverb goes.



Skullduggery, manipulation, rumormongering, social dueling, and outright proxy warfare (using Plush slaves) are the arenas where the Ladies contend.

- *The Plush Tribe*: Many moons ago, Queen Caw and her forces drove the Rux, the chief of the Plush, away from his Tribe and forced his people into bondage. Thought dead by the Queen, some of his enslaved tribesmen yet believe he roams the Desert of Glass, until he can return and give them liberty. But until then, beanbag bunny and stuffed stegosaur toil patiently under the yoke of the Fashdol.
- *Desken*: The hill of Desken contains mysterious treasures in its vaults -- books, paper, tools. Lady Anne lives here, and has gained much knowledge from her perusal of ancient tomes. She holds classes here for training Plush servants in needed tasks, and has some control over cloth harvested from the caves of Mount Hutch.
- *The Great Horse*: The Great Horse is a huge sculpture, looming over a corner of the Realm. The Queen holds her court here, under its enigmatic stare.
- *Lookout Point*: This tower is the closest outpost to the Gate to the Desert of Glass. A Plush watchman is usually stationed here, just in case.
- *The Mansion*: Lady Barbara lives in The Mansion, waited on hand and foot by her Plush slaves. The Box of Healing and Couture (needle, thread, scissors, pins) takes up an entire parlor downstairs. (Lady Barbara wrested it from Lady Alexandra of the Tiers. Soon after, she received the title of Royal Seamstress; at the time, she held Prince Kenneth's attention, and thus Queen Caw's favor.)
- *Mount Hutch*: Soaring over the plains, Mount Hutch is the tallest peak in the Queen's Realm. No one has ever scaled it, but legends tell of a musical oracle trapped in a coffin at the summit, which will answer three questions to the one who frees her. Its caverns hold acres and acres of cloth, valuable to all Queen's Realmers.
- *The Plush Cavern*: Those Plush not in direct service to one of the nobility, being schooled at Desken, or serving time in the Prince's Park as "wild" Plush make their home here. The indigenous Hanging Cloths are used to make nests and repairs to abused Plush skins. Effalunt, tool of the Queen and traitor of the Rux, oversees unclaimed (no one says "Free") Plush.
- *Queen's Plateau*: Queen Caw resides in the Royal Pavilion, built of layers of sod and stone, squarely in the center of the Plateau. Beneath lies the Prince's Park, where he hunts "wild" Plush and hangs his trophies from the roots of the Plateau. He knocks them down regularly, to make room for new beasts. The freed trophies scamper back into the recesses of the Park (or back to their Ladies).
- *The Tiers*: A multi-terraced cliff, the Tiers holds strange sculptures, artifacts, and artwork related to the "Lost Goddess," as well as a small number of books. Lady Alexandra rules here, and controls the Royal Tea Set, used on high holy days and state occasions.

The Desert of Glass

The land and sky in this World are a shiny, pearl white glass (chips of it are mined at the cracks of the Gates by other Three Worlders for jewelry and tools).

Geographical features of this World are also white and shiny; afternoons in the desert are unbearably bright. It's also significantly warmer than the other two Worlds. In this stark landscape lies a precious resource: water. The Iron Lake is often brimful with it, though the water level changes mysteriously. The Rub'ayr Tribe calls the Desert home. Water also exists in the Cauldron and hidden in a secret cave in the Glass Butte.

- *The Rub'ayr Tribe*: (Also known as Glass Desert Dwellers.) A small band of philosophic monsters, which lurk in the Desert. They ask riddles of intruders, and attack any who fail to answer correctly. They can be distracted by philosophical wrangling -- "Is there in truth no beauty, and in beauty no truth?"; "Would a rose by any other name smell as sweet?"; or the classic

"What's the sound of one hand clapping?" They're content with thought-games, splashing in the waters of the Iron Lake and the Cauldron, and committing acts of mayhem on intruders. Any who enter seeking water must treat or contend with them, for only the Rub'ayr know the rituals/procedures for calling water from the Desert.

- *The Cauldron:* Atop a hill, the Cauldron sits: sometimes empty, sometimes full. The Boneless Thing haunts this area. The Cauldron has the only supply of "cleaning clay" in the Three Worlds -- the Boneless Thing won all of it from his Iron Lake tribesmen in riddle games.
- *Cave of Lin:* It is unknown what treasures and wonders lie within this sealed cave -- the Gate leading into it has never been opened, and the crack below is too small for any of the Rub'ayr to crawl under.
- *Glass Butte:* It is said water fills the hollow of the Glass Butte, but none have been able to look inside to see. The exiled chief of the Plush -- the Rux -- makes his camp in its shadow. The Rub'ayr have learned that he is still dangerous, and respect this wise, one-eyed warrior, but they are not friendly with him.
- *The Iron Lake:* Usually brimful with precious water, the Iron Lake is the home to the Drake -- a giant yellowish dragon (of sorts) and Skifneldir, a living boat. They bicker and banter while swimming lazily around, only cooperating with each other (and the Boneless Thing) when the lake level needs to be replenished.

Clans' Land

(Known as "the Gnome Kingdoms" in the Queen's Realm.) The sky is a pale blue and the grass is a deep sea green; the geographical features of this World abound in those colors, along with navy blues, grays, and blacks.

- *The Action Clan:* The Action Clan (and their enemies, the Sorcerer's Clan) holds one thing more important than any other: glory. Glory is fame gained from a combination of factors: prowess in battle, the size of one's Herd, the quality of one's reputation, and the excellence of one's crafting talents. Glory is the most vital element of a Clans' Lander's existence, serving as

status, currency, and contract. The culture of the Action Clan shares elements with those of Amerindians, Celts, and Vikings: Cuchulain's cattle raids, the Sioux's counting coup on an enemy, and fighting and feasting through eternity in Valhalla are good touchstones. Guy Jozef, a wily warrior, is chief of the Clan, and rules through the weight of his glory and tactical genius.

- *The Sorcerer's Clan:* The Shadow Knight is a mighty sorcerer. The camp of his Clan lies on top of Storm Mountain. The Sorcerer's Clan is composed of the Shadow Knight, his aide Grimlock, and a band of Troopers so alike as to be identical. They, like the Action Clan, lust for glory; but unlike their enemy Clan, Troopers see battle-glory as the *only* way to individualize themselves. Thus they fight all the harder and listen to their chief all the more obediently.
- *HEX-Blox "Clan":* Calling HEX-Blox a Clan is a misnomer -- it is a single hive creature, constructed out of interlocking blocks of differing sizes and shapes. Individual constructions share the same (alien) mind, and are brutally efficient in raiding and combat. While it sees glory as a valuable commodity to have, it doesn't really feel a strong connection to matters of honor. HEX-Blox, due to its many mechanical components, is a useful resource for the other Clans when they need something moved, lifted, or opened, but the bargains it strikes for services are downright odd . . .
- *The Herds:* (Also called "Beasts" in Fantasy or "Mechanicals" in Science Fiction.) Not a Clan, but a class of non-sentient animals. The Herds are a visible measure of glory, a valuable material for tool and weapon construction, and a source of extra energy. The Clans' Landers vie for the wild Herds and the Herds of the other Clans. Typical Herd creatures are between 1" and 2" tall.
- *Book Butte:* This hill contains valuable tools and books, many of them too dangerous for any Clan to gain sole control of. Patrols from each faction ensure that no more than a single seeker after knowledge from each Clan climbs it simultaneously, per a long-standing treaty.
- *Jozef Mesa:* Behind the boulder on top of the mesa lies the Action cantonment, well defended and fortified. In the caves beneath the Mesa, the Herds of Clan members are corralled and watched.
- *The Longhouse:* A mystery structure -- a house with no doors. It is theorized that the roof can be lifted, but no one has attempted to do so. Yet.
- *Lost Cavern:* Wild and escaped Herd creatures lurk near this sealed cave -- the Gate to it has never been opened, and the crack below too small for any larger Three Worlders to follow the beasts inside.
- *Mesa of Ledges:* Most of its manifold treasures already stolen, the Mesa of Ledges is currently a No Man's Land, and the usual battlefield for Clan warfare (rather than raids).
- *The Spire:* An Action Clan warrior is posted here, to watch for unauthorized access to Book Butte. The nearby, unnamed wooden tower (the chair) is the location of the Sorcerer's Clan guard.
- *Storm Mountain:* The peak of Storm Mountain holds the tent citadel of the Shadow Knight; its caverns have been plundered for cloth, which the Shadow Knight has used to build his fortress, climbing nets, and a complicated elevator/crane system (using a stolen wheel from HEX-Blox). His Herd is corralled beneath the

Mountain.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

Like, Duh!

They're toys.

The Truth About the Three Worlds & Outside

The house and its vicinity are deserted of (non-toy) life. Whether this is due to warfare, disease, or disaster is the GM's call, as is whether or not life elsewhere survived the cataclysm.

The power field only functions within the rooms that compose the Three Worlds; the hallway is a dead area. However, the spaces *between* the walls -- where water pipes, power lines, or circuitry are threaded -- are within the power field, and may lead to other power fields in the house -- maybe a kitchen, game room/parlor, or workshop.

Water Sources

The only sources of water in the Three Worlds are in the Desert of Glass: the taps for the Cauldron and the Iron Lake, and the reservoir and bowl of the Glass Butte. All must trade or trick the Rub'ayr for water. Small volumes in suitable containers may be held by some of the important NPCs in the setting, but probably no more than a few drams. If the water supply for the house has failed through loss of pressure or a damaged pipe, water becomes a non-renewable resource, and the Rub'ayr will guard it all the more fiercely.

Cloth Sources

In addition to the clothing in Mount Hutch, Plush Cavern, and Storm Mountain, vast untapped bolts of cloth are to be found in the Cave of Lin and the Lost Cavern. All probably contain other valuables.

Weapons & Accessories

There are two sorts of weapons in the Three Worlds: True Weapons (the accessories of the Clans' Landers) and Gross Weapons (clubs, bows, blades, etc., manufactured out of found materials). As noted above, True Weapons "numb" a toy temporarily, while Gross weapons cause physical damage. However, only physical dismemberment or destruction with a Gross Weapon can permanently incapacitate a toy.

Some toys may have special accessories -- grappling hooks, winches, telescopes, what have you -- which may or may not really function (GM's call). Use of these special accessories might cost energy, especially important if playing under *OPTION: Scarce Resources*.

Toypunk Technology

The tools that toys construct for themselves out of found material -- bits of other toys, ropes woven from threads, pieces of cloth, lengths of wire, pieces of molding -- are Toypunk Technology. Gross Weapons, the elevator system up

OPTION: Fantasy

If *OPTION: Fantasy* is in play, a number of changes go into effect:

- The house is a wizard's abode.
- The toys are various types of golems.
- True Weapons are melee weapons, and only the Clans' Landers have them. A strike from a True Weapon temporarily suppresses the golems' motive enchantment; they are equally or only slightly less effective on Queen's Realmers.
- The golems are composed of appropriate materials for low-tech worlds, with rubber or treated leather standing in for plastic. The golems are either solid material, or a thin shell of solid material packed with stuffing. Clans' Landers are predominantly made of tin, pewter, or lead.
- Herd beasts are usually animals like deer, horses, dinosaurs, or mythical

Storm Mountain, catapults, book holders, air or water pumps, or hang gliders all fit the idiom.

The Boy & The Girl

The toys may retain vague memories of their owners -- the Girl (for the Queen's Realm) and the Boy (for the Clans' Land). They could be venerated as gods, aliens, tribal spirits, or lost comrades. A GM can have fun with seeming random edicts of the Boy or the Girl ("Don't go in there!" or "Never leave your tools on the bed!") and how they've become religious or cultural proscriptions over time.

NPC Backgrounds

Action Clan

Action Clan members are small, nimble, skilled with weapons, and stand 3-1/2" tall.

- **Chief Guy Jozef:** Guy is a tactical genius and skilled warrior. He wishes to keep his honor bright, his Clan safe, and his Herd large (in that order). He's interested in arranging a regular supply of water for his Clan.
- **Purple Smith:** Purple is a mighty smith, and serves as the Action Clan's medic and shaman. Boastful and brusque, he's curious about the mysteries of the Longhouse and the Lost Cavern.
- **Vulpina:** Vulpina is one of the few female Action Clan members. She is sneaky, tricky, and an excellent shot with her bow; she once riddled successfully with the Boneless Thing. She lost a leg in battle with Grimlock, and makes due with a fallen comrade's limb. She desires her own leg back.
- **The Swan Knight:** An immaculate enigma, this quiet master of the sword wears glittering armor, inlaid with chips from the Desert of Glass. Arrogant and disdainful, he lusts for the destruction of the Shadow Knight.

Fashdol Tribe

Fashdol are big, devious, dexterous, and stand between 8" and 1' tall.

- **Queen Caw:** (Baby Wet & Cry) One of the two largest Three Worlders, Queen Caw is big, strong, tough, and rules with an iron fist. She indulges her son Prince Kenneth in everything. The infighting of her court amuses her. She wishes to annex the Desert of Glass, if Lady Anne can train a Plush army.
- **Prince Kenneth aka the Mighty Hunter:** (Plastic) Mama's boy, object of desire, and spoiled brat, Prince Kenneth does have one redeeming feature: he is an expert hunter. Mercurial and vapid, he flits from Lady to Lady at whim.
- **Lady Barbara aka Royal Seamstress:** (Plastic) Stylish, devious, and beautiful, the Lady Barbara enjoys cruelly abusing her Plush slaves. Currently on the outs with the prince, she has nonetheless secured her standing in the court with the theft of the Box of Healing and Couture.

beasts.

- Some of the toys may know limited forms of magic, especially Queen Caw, Lady Anne, the Drake, the Shadow Knight, and Purple Smith.

OPTION: Science Fiction

If *OPTION: Science Fiction* is in play, a number of small changes go into effect:

- The house is a "Home of the Future."
- The toys are varied types of robots.
- True Weapons are ray guns, force swords, or beam rifles, and only the Clans' Landers have them. A strike from a True Weapon activates a sensor that shuts a robot down for a short period of time. Since Queen's Realmers lack these sensors, True Weapons are completely ineffective against them.
- The robots are composed of various types of plastic, with circuitry interiors. Plush Tribe circuitry is woven throughout their stuffing and skin.
- Herd beasts are usually metallic vehicles like cars, jets, space ships, and the occasional "cutesy" robot.
- Desken and Book Butte may hold data panels that access the house's computer. If a toy knows the human/god/alien language (unlikely, but possible), it could call up information from the computer system.

OPTION: Horror

She desires more varieties of cloth to create ever-finer clothes for herself.

- **Lady Lady Alexandra of the Tiers:** (Porcelain) While possessed of a delicate, rare beauty, the Lady Alexandra has a precise, rigid, stuffy demeanor -- perhaps it comes from surrounding herself with the artifacts of the past. She is keeper of the Royal Tea Set. Her secret talent is that she can hypnotize any Three Worlder wearing (or naturally bearing) the color purple. She seeks revenge on Lady Barbara, and is close to becoming the Prince's next paramour.
- **Lady Lady Anne of Desken:** (Cloth) Responsible for the education of the Plush, Lady Anne is a clever, long-suffering soul often discriminated against due to her similarity in construction to the Plush. She has recently been dumped by the Prince (for treating her Plush servants "too well"), and wishes to become queen of the Plush and take over the kingdom.

HEX-Blox

Typical HEX-Blox drones are weird, logical, modular, and about 4" in height. HEX-Blox is a single entity, and its consciousness is spread throughout its blocks. The more blocks a drone is composed of, the smarter it is. The main HEX-Blox compound is exceedingly intelligent, and has deciphered the human/god/alien language. HEX-Blox knows it is missing pieces required to pursue its goal: exploration of the Outside. It deduces that the extra pieces may be in either the Lost Cavern, the Longhouse, or in the Desert of Glass, and is waiting for the right opportunity to search for them.

Plush Tribe

Plush are soft, resilient, patient, shy, and stand between 2" and 1-1/2' tall.

- **The Rux:** One of the two largest Three Worlders, the Rux is the exiled king of the Plush. Big, strong, tough, and one-eyed, the Rux has a natural aptitude for language(s). He lurks in the Desert of Glass, biding his time and licking his wounds, until the day comes when he can cast Queen Caw Outside forever.
- **Pooky:** Prince Kenneth's noble steed, Pooky is stupid, strong, and fast. While devoted to the Prince, Pooky is being co-opted by Lady Anne, who treats him less like a slave than a friend.
- **Herbert:** Clumsy and lazy, no one worries much about Herbert . . . but it's all an act. Herbert is tough, sneaky, and the Rux's loyal bonds-hippo. He quietly foments Plush rebellion, and keeps the Rux updated on current events (they speak weekly, through the crack of the Gate).
- **Effalunt:** Once the Rux's right-hand, cruel Effalunt betrayed her King for power at the urging of Queen Caw. She lords her position over other Plush, and sees herself as equal to any of the Ladies of the court. However, when she insisted on being called "Lady Effalunt," Lady Alexandra had her whipped for public amusement. Lady Barbara stitched the wounds back together, so now Effalunt owes the Royal Seamstress a favor. Effalunt doesn't trust Lady Anne.

Sorcerer's Clan

Sorcerer's Clan members are small, nimble, skilled with weapons, obedient, and stand 3-1/2" tall.

Particularly appropriate with *OPTION: Scarce Resources* enabled, horror cranks up the fear factor, making the toys and their world(s) more threatening and malevolent. They have run wild, gone feral, or have become fascistic -- consider the effect of having toys possessed of the emotional maturity of a child but the intellect and prowess of an adult. Unable to adequately control their emotions, the toys are mercurial, stubborn, and selfish (at their worst). Picture a bratty five-year old with a Thompson machine gun.

Some further refinements to *OPTION: Horror*:

- *Toy Vampirism:* If other toys must be tapped for energy, then the cultures of the Three Worlds become more predatory and violent. Plush and Herd beasts provide normal sustenance, with the energy of enemies a particular treat. Under *OPTION: Fantasy*, a toy must break or tear its victim (at minimum, a limb or other sizable amount) into small pieces using a Gross Weapon or tool, then mix the pieces with water, and coat themselves in the debris. Over two hours, the energy of the victim (or fraction of energy within the body part) will be leached into the consumer. Toys under *OPTION: Science Fiction* have it a bit easier -- the process involves connecting leads from the victim's power cells to one's own; this draining process takes fifteen minutes.

- **The Shadow Knight:** Clad in dark, burnished armor, the Shadow Knight uses his genius for sorcery/science, expert tactical mind, and good combat skills to quest for power and knowledge. He ruthlessly seeks dominion over the Clans' Land, and a deeper understanding of the mysteries of the Three Worlds.
- **Grimlock:** Once a lowly Trooper, Grimlock is strong, fast, and cunning. He loves to fight against the strongest opponents he can find. He serves the Shadow Knight because that allows him to test his mettle often. Vulpina's leg is his favorite battle-trophy.
- **Troopers:** Troopers are only competent in the ways of warfare. They are obedient, if a little slow, and constantly seek to distinguish themselves in battle, to gain a name of their own.

The Dead Gods: Perhaps the Boy and the Girl died in their rooms, and the toys have utilized pieces and parts into their Toypunk Technology. Particularly appropriate in this case includes using the Girl's bones as tent poles in the Queen's Pavilion and the Boy's skull as the central keep of the Shadow Knight's citadel.

Rub'ayr Tribe

Rub'ayr Tribe members are big, resilient, strong, and flexible. They all enjoy riddle games and philosophy, and will trade water for valuable trinkets or new riddles.

- **The Drake:** (Rubber Ducky) Four inches tall and a half-foot long, the Drake paddles cheerfully on the Iron Lake. He's an optimist and layabout. His goal is to swim forever in peace, but the jibes of his friend Skifneldir often interrupt his reveries.
- **Skifneldir:** (Wooden Tug) Six inches from stem to stern, with a draft of two inches and a freeboard of 3-1/2 inches, Skifneldir is a large Three Worlder. He's a pessimist, and loves to taunt his friend the Drake, as they coast on the waters of the Iron Lake.
- **The Boneless Thing:** (Sponge Glove) Eight inches long, two inches thick, the Boneless Thing scuttles around the Desert of Glass on five legs of differing lengths. It is the strongest Three Worlder, somewhat elastic, and an inveterate jokester. It's just looking for a good time.

Events & Possible Story Arcs

- *Human Intruders:* An interesting scenario could involve human PCs entering the twisted environment of the Three Worlds (full size or shrunken) and interacting with the toys; contrariwise, perhaps giant invaders come to loot the Three Worlds, and the PC toys must defend it.
- *Mint in the Box:* An unknown toy is discovered deep within the Lost Cavern, the vaults of Mount Hutch or Desken, the Longhouse, or the Plush Cavern, trapped in a miraculous coffin. Once the coffin is opened, the person wakes, and quickly becomes active in local machinations. This is an excellent way to get new PCs into a Toybox Tribes campaign.
- *Rescued At Last:* A Three Worlder of strange form and features is recovered from Outside. Whether a Clans' Lander pulled into the Queen's Realm or vice-versa, the existence of the other kingdom is now established as fact. Which faction recommends exploration, which urges invasion, and what do the PCs think?

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

- *Take A Role:* Players might want to select one of the NPCs provided above to roleplay, rather than creating a toy from whole cloth. This would be especially suited to a game of political intrigue and romance in the Queen's Realm. A single player could also take multiple roles in multiple kingdoms. A single player could play all Troopers, for example.
- *Props/"Miniatures":* It could be amusing and inspiring for each player to find a suitable prop to represent their character. For example, using plastic army men for Troopers, or a Beanie Baby for a Plush. That way, the player will not only have a "miniature" to position during the game, but can also use the figure as a measure of scale or to display how a character performs a particular action.

- *Silly? Could be!:* Though not the intent of this column, the potential for humorous play is obvious in a setting based on toys. If the GM and the players are comfortable with getting wacky, great. However, if those in the group cannot come to an agreement about the level of humor in a Toybox Tribes campaign, that is a serious pitfall. If running Toybox Tribes as-is (i.e., without altering the map or other bits of the background), GMs should discuss the campaign beforehand, and get buy-in from all parties involved on the level of humor. Nothing will kill a Toybox Tribes campaign faster than a PC being silly if the tone is serious, or too grim if the mode is light-hearted. An ounce of prevention yields a pound of cure.

Other Resources

- [*Child's Play*](#) (and its sequels)
- [*Demonic Toys*](#)
- [*Dollman*](#)
- [*Dollman vs. Demonic Toys*](#)
- *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, by Richard Matheson ([book](#) and [film](#))
- [*The Incredible Shrinking Woman*](#)
- [*Puppetland*](#)
- [*Puppet Master*](#) (and its sequels)
- [*Puppet Master Vs. Demonic Toys*](#)
- [*Rudolph, the Red-nosed Reindeer*](#)
- [*Small Soldiers*](#)
- [*Toy Story*](#)
- [*Toy Story 2*](#)

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Building An Iron Curtain Between Player And Character Shouldn't Make You See Red

Quick -- yet lame -- joke:

A large live-action roleplaying game was being held in a mansion. Its hundred-plus players were all having a good time, until pandemonium breaks out from the second floor, and players start streaming out of the house in a barely controlled panic.

A storyteller runs up to a player, whose character was the village idiot. "You've got to get out of here!" the storyteller said. "A large fire's broken out in an upstairs bedroom; if you don't get out of here, the entire house will burn down . . . with you in it!"

The player frowns and says, "That may be . . . but my *character* doesn't know that!"

(I *did* say it was lame . . .)

Anyway, I promised last week to address a topic touched upon tangentially a couple weeks ago: the notion of the wall (or lack thereof) between player and character knowledge and experiences. This week I'll be talking about why walls are good; next week I'll talk about why walls are bad. The week after we'll play Pink Floyd's *The Wall* at the same time we watch the *Wizard of Oz* . . . make sure to press "Play" at the end of the MGM lion's third roar! (Okay, I'm kidding about the last one; we'll actually be using *Dark Side of the Moon*.)

Anyway, I think we all agree that there is traditionally a de facto wall between players and characters. Most of us lack the skills necessary to cleave a dragon in half with a sword, mine ore from an asteroid, or create a digital representation of ourselves to hack into corporate databases without using AOL's Instant Netrunner. ("You've got ICE!") So there comes a point when we need to acknowledge that our characters have skills, knowledge, and abilities that we do not.

Once one draws that line, it can be easier to assume that *all* aspects of the character are best left on one side of that line. For example, if you're playing a computer hacker, and your character is trying to disable an opponent's network, there's no need to detail about how you're instigating a denial-of-service attack upon him; you can simply say you're trying to use your character's vastly superior computer skills to crush his opponent's systems. In fact, it can be *better* to avoid giving details; unless you're an expert in the same field as the character, your character will probably be able to come up with better solutions than what you can. (I'm reminded of a line I read one time where a writer was saying how easy it is to write for television doctors: "Nurse! This man needs 50ccs of medicine! STAT!")

Perhaps even more importantly, your GM isn't required to have the same knowledge you have; provided you all agree on the generalities ("Computer skill can be used to hack into cell phones, but they can't be used to program someone's wristwatch from afar"), then the *hows* of what the characters do isn't that important; it really isn't any more relevant to explain why a computer programmer can't reprogram a watch than it is to explain why a priest can't use healing magic on a zombie. Keeping knowledge separate also hinders pointless arguments from erupting; if your GM decides that your character's cell phone conversations were hacked (since that's what everyone agreed on), you can't say, "Nuh-uh! My cell phone was digital! You *can't* hack those calls! I work for the largest digital cellular provider in the world, and I know that . . ." It's really unfair to expect the GM to contain the sum knowledge of all of his players.

The same also applies to any interactions with the "real world." Take, for example, a situation where a player forgets the name of the underworld contact they were going to Lucky's Bar for. In a game with a thin (or nonexistent) curtain between player/character, the GM might say, "Well, if you forgot, then so did your character." But in a game with a thicker curtain, it's entirely acceptable for the GM to say, "Give me an Intelligence roll to see if your character remembers."

Of course, it's entirely possible for this kind of attitude to become absurd; if a player is constantly rolling to see if, say, his dumb character is allowed to remember something he remembers as a player ("Do I know King Randolph's name?"), or come up with basic plans ("Oil is slippery; we could pour some on the floor and let the bad guys run over it and fall! Err . . . would my character think of that?") is not only silly, but can slow down the game immeasurably.

Likewise, requiring players to solve puzzles, defeat riddle contests, discover clues on envelopes handed to them, or other physical interactions in the real world -- without any chance for characters to utilize their skills -- then you run the risk of having your players revolt. (Like, say, a stupid vocal puzzle in a *Torg* campaign . . .) Of course, props can still make a wonderful addition (say, a letter from a potential love interest, or a newspaper article detailing the heroes' exploits), but expecting the players to glean additional information out of props -- without any input from their characters -- is probably dangerous.

Now, some campaigns make it easier to create a wall between player and character knowledge. Fantasy, for example, is generally quite easy to maintain; when there are three moons orbiting a flat planet, and magic can create inertialess flight, and the world has been ruled by a Dragon Prince for three thousand years, then presumably one's knowledge of police procedure, quantum physics, and European history won't be terribly useful; a player won't need to worry much that he'll be drawing on his real world experience to help out. (If he has his dungeon-crawling character casually mixes two parts sulfur with three parts charcoal and 15 parts saltpeter, you have my permission to pelt him from across the table with a Cheese Puff.)

Likewise, sufficiently advanced Sci-Fi worlds (or, perhaps more correctly, Space Opera) don't need to worry much about character knowledge. Knowing what is actually theorized by quantum physics doesn't mean you'll know how to deal with Madeupium in a *Star Trek* campaign. (I actually ran into a small problem as a player in a *Fading Suns* game when I had my character -- a Feudal Knight -- inadvertently rely on some Einsteinian theories to try to solve the mystery of why the suns were fading. It seems highly unlikely that my character would have known that, especially given how much knowledge had been lost or suppressed by the church in that setting. Unfortunately that knowledge was so much a part of *my* mindset that I'd completely forgotten that.)

Modern, historical, or near-past/near-future games present a greater challenge. If it's possible for player knowledge to creep in in a game set in the year 5000 AD -- like *Fading Suns* -- then it's even more possible in a time when the players are likely to have knowledge of the world. This can be blatant ("It's November 1st, 1963? Let's spend the month in Dallas and see if anything interesting happens!") or more insidious ("Wait! The police can't arrest me! Their search warrant can't possibly cover searching the entire apartment complex; it's unconstitutional!"). Even if a player doesn't mean to do such, it can be difficult to maintain that wall between player and character knowledge. If everyone agrees that a rigid curtain is going to be used, then it should be determined *how* that curtain will be maintained, and what will happen if it's breached. (This can range from the GM saying, "You can't do/know that," to the GM withholding experience points for consistent violators, to the GM actively changing the law, history, or the principles of physics to keep the players on their toes.)

In the end, if all the players (and the GM) are agreeable, a thick wall between Player and Character experiences can make many types of roleplaying possible, and keep the players from being frustrated when they cannot do something where it seems logical their characters *could*.

Just make sure player *and* character know to leave the house if there's a fire.

* * *

Well, you may note that Kenneth Hite has supplied us with a doozy of a column this week. Unfortunately, the overworked nature of the all-mighty Hite's life means that he'll probably be taking at least the next couple of weeks off. Hopefully he'll slay all those dragons in his life, and will come back to *Pyramid*, where he's beloved and praised, and occasionally paid with magic beans.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **GURPS Werewolf**, p. 39.*

(Two stars) "The ultimate DUNGEON MASTER fantasy! This is *the* most deluxe dungeon, designed to appeal to discriminating and demanding role-players. This is more than just a dragon hunt. Within the lair of this beast lie cruel and deadly traps, befuddling conundrums and puzzles, and cunning minions that will be the end of overconfident or careless adventurers."

Double Secret Illuminati

A Variant for *Illuminati*

by Steve Honeywell

It's common knowledge that the Illuminati control the world. What isn't known, really, is which Illuminatus is in charge. "Double Secret Illuminati" simulates the uncertainty of knowing who is really in control by having each player hide his true Illuminati colors. This game works best with four players and cannot be played with more than five.

Object

This game is similar to *Deluxe* (or *Classic*) *Illuminati*, and works for three to five players, although four is ideal. Each player possesses two Illuminati, one of which they use to control groups and draw income, and one which exists as the true power behind the throne.

Setup

At the beginning of the game, each player selects two Illuminati groups to play. One group is placed face-up, and is the face the player presents to the world. The other Illuminati group is placed facedown under the first Illuminatus. This is the real Illuminatus, the power behind the exposed puppet. Players can select which of their two Illuminati groups they choose to show the world and which they want to be their true self. Any unused Illuminati are discarded without anyone seeing the groups. Part of the fun of this version is not knowing who is whom.

Players use the power, income, victory conditions, and special ability of the exposed group for everything. The hidden group is used only to determine winning conditions.

Winning Conditions

The game is played as normal with the following stipulation: to win, a player must fulfill two victory conditions. One of these two conditions must be the special victory condition of his hidden Illuminatus. For instance, a player with the Gnomes of Zurich exposed and the Bavarian Illuminati hidden must control enough power to satisfy the victory conditions for the Bavarians and either control enough groups or have enough money to satisfy the Gnomes. Naturally, this makes for a very long and cutthroat game as each player attempts to learn exactly who is what. Expect a game with four players to last a good three hours or more due to the added victory condition.

Special Rules

- *Special Rules for the Church of the SubGenius*: A player with the Church of the SubGenius as his hidden group must win by satisfying the special win conditions of both of his groups. He cannot control enough groups for a basic victory and then claim a win by virtue of having more than enough groups to satisfy the special win conditions of the Church of the SubGenius. There are no special rules governing a player with the Church of the SubGenius exposed.
- *Special Rules for the UFOs*: A player with the UFOs on top must select a victory condition for them, just like normal. However, the secret victory condition for the UFOs cannot be the same as that of his hidden group. A player with the UFOs as his hidden group must also select a special victory condition for the UFOs. Again, this special victory condition cannot be the same as that of the player's visible group. All rules regarding the Church of the SubGenius apply to a player with the UFOs hidden who selects the Church of the SubGenius's victory

conditions.

- *Special Rules for the Unmasked card:* Anyone playing this card can choose to replace either his exposed or hidden group. He may not look at the unused groups to make his choice in this; he simply selects one of the unused Illuminati and chooses which of his two Illuminati to replace. If desired, the player can discard his exposed group, turn his hidden group over (it becomes his new exposed group) and place the new group as his new hidden group. If five people are playing Double Secret Illuminati, remove this card at the beginning of the game.
- *Special Rules for the Computer Espionage card:* This card cannot be used to learn the identity of another player's hidden Illuminatus.
- *Special Rules for controllable groups:* Groups that enhance an Illuminatus' income or number of cards drawn apply only if they match the exposed group. Thus a player who controls the Weathermen draws an extra card only if his exposed group is The Bermuda Triangle.

So, What Brings You Here?

Seven Great Places for Adventuring Parties to Meet

by Daniel Bronson

A man walks into a bar . . .

So do a couple of clerics (one of whom is dwarven), an elven wizard, and a half-orc acrobat-thief (it's-a-long-story-don't-ask). The elderly monk in the corner looks over this hodgepodge of possible adventurers, smiles to himself knowingly, and pulls an old, wrinkled treasure map from his robe. Before he can so much as clear his throat, however, the half-orc robs the dwarven cleric blind and swaggers out. The man -- a young fighter in the city guard -- gets his drink and makes his way to a table, bumping into the clerics in the process. Noticing his missing change-purse for the first time, the dwarf cries out "Thief!" and begins to attack the fighter. The second cleric chimes in, throwing handfuls of fire at the man as he runs out the door. Stray flames quickly ignite the dry wood of the bar, barrels of alcohol begin to boil like there's no tomorrow (which is admittedly true as far as the barrels are concerned), and the wizard teleports away. The monk and the rest of the patrons are left to scramble for safety as fast as they can. Seconds later, explosions level the place . . .

Let's face it, it isn't always easy to bring a new group of characters together. Any team worth its salt is going to be a grab-bag of talents, weaknesses, and egos, and getting all of those very different people to play nice realistically can take a bit of work. It's easy enough to say they just happen to be a team, but that can leave more story-oriented players unsatisfied. In an attempt to provide some ideas on uniting adventurers, what follow are seven great places for such individuals to run into each other. What they do then is up to them.

At a Party

"Bob, this is Janice. She bends steel girders with her mind. Janice, meet Bob. He can turn himself invisible."

Everybody loves a party, be it a birthday celebration at a friend's apartment or a week-long holy festival throughout the streets of the kingdom's capital. It isn't hard to imagine heroes- and heroines-to-be getting introduced through mutual acquaintances at such functions -- even if such introductions don't come naturally. Anyone who gets sloshed enough just might start admitting to all kinds of things, including his brief stint with The Company, the fact that his best friend is a werewolf, or that he actually *did* try to take over the world a couple of years ago but he was stopped by a nice young lady who likes to run around at night in an incredibly daring outfit. No, really, it's true. In fact, he was so thankful to be pulled back onto the straight-and-narrow that he invited her to the festivities. See? That's her right over there. With the balloon hat.

Of course, it's also possible for people to find one another without a middleman. They might just stand back and admire each other's handiwork at the various game booths, for example. Few things say "Look how dexterous I am!" better than a perfect score at Whack-A-Vermin. And who wouldn't want the winner of a momentous jousting tournament on the team? Heck, who wouldn't want the guy who came in second place? There are plenty of contests out there to give merrymakers the chance to strut their stuff. Think of it as a cross between a job fair and a talent show.

In Battle

"There is something I ought to tell you."

"Tell me."

"I'm not left-handed either."

--Westley and Inigo, *The Princess Bride*

It's the classic tale of good guy fights good-hearted bad guy, or good guy meets good guy and each thinks the other is a bad guy, or good-hearted bad guy runs into another good-hearted bad guy and . . . well, you get the point. The first time the adventurers come together, they are very much not on the same side. They clash. They spar. They realize that their foe is not only pretty skilled at what she does, but she acts in a respectful manner. They have found an Honorable Opponent. Later, when the misunderstanding has been cleared up and/or circumstances bring them together again, these kindred spirits can join forces against the Greater Evil, whatever that may be.

As a side note, it should be realized that this original "battle" does not have to be in the form of a physical brawl. Lawyers may meet each other head on in court, thieves may be stealing a particular jewel from one another, and charioteers might be out to win a particular race. There are plenty of ways in which people can compete without ever drawing a weapon. The important point is that they do so admirably. (Or not. If the campaign calls for uniting scum, such individuals might be more impressed by an opponent who is capable of bringing some truly original underhanded tricks to the team.)

Natural Crisis

"Hey! I was going to save her!"

There's nothing quite like a good dose of Man (or Woman, or Three-Eyed-Thing) versus Nature for bringing people together. Rampant forest fires bear down on villages, freak snowstorms isolate communities, devastating earthquakes bury hundreds under tons of rubble, and [*threatening adjective*] hurricanes flood entire regions. When these disasters strike, the resultant chaos is -- or at least can be made to be -- far too much for any one person to handle. "Teamwork" will be the word of the day, and there's no "I" in "teamwork!" (Unless you spell it in a different language, but we're not going to get into that.)

Rescuers might start out working alone in various parts of Greater Metropolis City when the storm of the century hits. There will be plenty to do, with much pulling of stranded pedestrians from the flood waters and guiding of out-of-control airplanes safely to the ground. When the Channel 27 broadcast tower starts to topple, though, it's going to take a couple people to slow it down while the others clear out the orphanage, the old folks' home, and the animal shelter that all lie in the tower's path. When the day's work is done, the champions of G.M.C. can finally have a chance to meet each other properly and trade war stories over pizza.

Imprisoned

"If we could just get to the storeroom where they've got my +1 Beater Stick of Taking Names we could really show them who's who . . ."

Imprisonment -- sooner or later it happens to the best of 'em. They might be in the cargo hold of a pirate ship, in the dungeon of an enemy king, or in the 5th Circle of Hell, but the important part (this time) is that they aren't alone. They've got someone with whom they can commiserate, with whom they can play checkers, and with whom they can plan an escape. Maybe no one's ever broken out of this place before, but if the prisoners pool their skills they just might make it.

A slight variant on this involves a prisoner (or prisoners) being rescued by what is effectively the rest of the adventuring party. Thankfulness can lead the former prisoner to offer his services easily enough -- *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, anyone? -- but the rescuers might not be so hot on the idea of having this guy in their group. He *did* manage to get himself imprisoned, after all. One option is that while getting to the prisoner wasn't too hard, busting back out of the place is going to take some serious work. This can give the "new team-member" a chance to prove himself. Alternately, the rescue goes off without a hitch, but the trip back home is a two-month journey fraught with

danger . . .

Traveling

"Looks like there's three terrorists in the engine car, two in the baggage area, seven in first class, and four more here in coach. And we're 10 miles from the bridge which has gone out. [sound effect of a big gun being chambered here] I just might need some help."

The constant clunk of the wagon wheels, the comforting creak of the main mast, the cacophonous crunch of the spaceship slingdrive -- ah, travel. Whether it's for business or pleasure, a nice long journey does an incredible job of taking would-be companions out of the (relatively) safe centers of civilization and throwing them into strange places with no end of new hazards. On the simplest level, spending days to weeks to months in close contact should give all but the most introverted travelers plenty of time to get to know each other. If the group still isn't congealing, it might be possible to push the issue by turning up the heat.

As with most of these scenarios, it isn't hard to work a problem into the mix. Going by airplane? Add a hijacker or three; make 'em smart and well-prepared. On the road with a caravan? Enter raiders and/or bandits stage left. Lots and lots of them. Roaming space in a cruiser? Blow out the FTL drive, release the alien infestation, and clog the food generator with oatmeal. Now you've got a truly bonding experience.

On the Job

"STAND UP STRAIGHT, YOU PUKES! IT'S TIME YOU LEARNED C.F. DON'T STAND FOR COMPLEMENTORY FORCES! IT MEANS CANNON FODDER!"

War makes for some strange bedfellows, and so do job contracts. When a wealthy -- and completely legitimate -- businessman hires a few top-notch bodyguards to keep an eye on his rebellious young daughter (all without her knowledge, of course), they had better learn how to work together. Doing otherwise would be dangerous, both in terms of future contracts and current kneecaps. The same can be said about a spacer crew, army recruits, and plumbers.

This is a nice, simple approach that forces a degree of teamwork that the characters (not just the players) know they are getting into. Granted, some of the bodyguards might be used to working solo, but if they can't handle being part of a squad they shouldn't have taken the job. After an adventure or two they just might find out they like having someone to cover their back, and then maybe they'll start hiring themselves out as a team instead of as individuals.

At School

"All who graduate from Adjya Enkhbat's Center for Advanced Horsemanship and Mongolian Horde Techniques are as brothers!"

It's always possible that an adventuring group will form before its members have even really had a chance to put their skills to use in the real world. Specifically, they can come together while they are still learning what they are capable of. This can work for monks still in the monastery, thieves just starting off in the Guild, young mutants being provided education and sanctuary, fighter pilots still in the Academy . . . the list goes on and on. These days of instruction don't have to actually be played out, mind you. Players may simply choose to have it be the history that ties the team together. It might be noted, however, that playing through this scenario is an excellent means by which both players and characters can get a handle on what they can do and how to best put their skills to use.

This translates nicely into the "common origin story" concept for groups of enhanced individuals who all picked up their powers by being in the same place at the right (or possibly wrong, depending on your point of view) time, a la Reed Richards et al. In general this assumes the adventurers were somehow associated before the event, but that's not necessary. Say, for instance, that a mystical meteorite slams into a nuclear power plant, and everyone gets out in time -

- I don't know how, they just do -- except a janitor, a core maintenance engineer, and a kid who showed up for a field trip. It goes almost without saying that those three people, who quite possibly have never met each other before, will end up with super-powers. And then maybe, just maybe, they will join together to Battle Evil and Bring Justice to the World.

Conclusion

This has been a mere sampling of the many places people can come together. There are plenty of others that can be brought into play, as it were. Adventurers could all be out to purchase the same item in the marketplace or at an auction house. Maybe the characters are in two small groups already, working as back street runners on the same deal for MegaCorp and The Son of MegaCorp, respectively. Explorers might even all be related in the first place, and the moment of truth hits at a family reunion. Regardless of the origin, fleshing it out gives the players a better feeling of how their characters can interact, both within the group and as a group.

Appendix Z: Starship Troubles

by David Morgan-Mar

Not all space flights are routine. In a large ship, there are usually some outstanding jobs which require engineers or mechanics. On a small ship, such as one a group of heroes might own, a minor mechanical problem can add a little spice to an otherwise dull flight, while a major event can be an adventure in itself. Here then is a list of some possible mechanical problems which might occur on board a starship. GMs can determine an event from this list randomly, choose one when some extra color is required, or incorporate these into starship combat damage result tables.

Minor Problems

- **Airlock Malfunction:** An airlock refuses to work. Failsafe systems usually mean the doors stay closed, requiring manual operation. This could be a serious problem in an emergency though.
- **Artificial Gravity Failure:** Everything floats off the floor. Liquids float out of containers, causing potential hazards. Characters may get space-sick. Restoration of gravity is possibly even more dangerous.
- **Auxiliary Craft Bay Failure:** A shuttlecraft or ground or other vehicle bay refuses to open, or close. The vehicle either cannot be deployed or parked.
- **Computer Glitch:** The ship's computer systems go into an unresponsive state and require a reboot. Sensible systems will have a backup, but not everyone can afford a sensible system. A glitch might also be responsible for some of the other effects on this list, requiring computer skills rather than mechanical skills to fix.
- **Door Jammed:** An internal door gets stuck, blocking access through it. A mechanic will need to fix it, or cut a hole through it.
- **Entertainment System Failure:** The ship's entertainment and amusement facilities break down. The crew are forced to play chess or (gasp) talk to each other.
- **Environmental Control Failure:** Air circulation stops or temperature control goes haywire. Near a star ships will overheat quickly; further away they freeze.
- **Galley Problem:** The food preparation equipment doesn't work properly. Everyone has to eat cold food, or the smell of burnt toast permeates the ship.
- **Internal Lighting Failure:** A fuse blows or the lights otherwise go out. It's *dark* in space. Crew will have to fumble their way around until they find the flashlights. And hope somebody checked the batteries recently.
- **Landing Gear Failure:** A warning light indicates a problem with the landing gear. This isn't an immediate danger, unless you're on final approach to a runway when it happens.
- **Plumbing Malfunction:** The plumbing systems stop working. A pipe is blocked or a pump has failed. Going to the toilet in space becomes even more of an adventure.
- **Radar/Passive Sensor Array Malfunction:** The ship's sensing equipment goes offline, or displays phantom blips. The ship is flying blind, but you can always look out the portholes, assuming there are any.
- **Radio Malfunction:** The radio receives nothing but static, or transmissions fail, or both. Communication with other ships or traffic control is impossible unless something is improvised.
- **Running Lights Failure:** External navigation lights are useful for dense traffic areas, or atmospheric operation. Without them, collisions become more likely, and hefty fines from authorities inevitable.
- **Shower Malfunction:** Whether sonic, chemical, or plain old water, the showers quit working. The crew become smelly and a failed repair attempt may burst a water pipe, turning this into a . . .
- **Water Leak:** A water pipe starts leaking. In zero gravity, blobs of water drift through the cabin, causing potential electrical failures in anything they touch.

Major Problems

- **Air Leak:** The ship is losing precious air. The leak may be obvious, or hard to track down. An EVA might be required to patch the leak.

- Control Systems Failure:** The ship doesn't respond to maneuver controls, or possibly drive controls. The ship may end up going somewhere unplanned, or running into something.
- **Cryogenic Leak:** Extremely cold liquid leaks out of a pipe or container, freezing everything it touches, including flesh.
 - **Defensive Systems Failure:** Force shields, point defence missiles, or chaff casters fail, leaving the ship vulnerable to attack.
 - **Drive Failure:** The main engine stops working. The ship coasts through space, unable to change course or speed.
 - **Explosion:** Part of the ship is destroyed and any crew in the area wounded or killed. Secondary damage to nearby systems may occur.
 - **Fire:** Fires consume oxygen *fast* and need to be extinguished. Nearby systems may be damaged or destroyed.
 - **Fuel Tank Rupture:** Fuel leaks from the tanks, either into space or into the ship's interior. Depending on the fuel, this could be an annoyance (water for fusion), a danger (chemical fuel), or disaster (antimatter).
 - **Heat Shielding Damage:** The shielding which protects the ship on atmospheric entry is damaged. Attempting re-entry might cause secondary damage or destroy the ship totally.
 - **Hull Breach:** A section of the hull is ruptured. Air, equipment, and crew are sucked out ferociously.
 - **Impact:** Something hits the ship, be it a rock or another ship. Hull breach and other secondary damage is possible, though not inevitable. The ship might just get shaken up.
 - **Life Support Failure:** Air supply stops. The crew will slowly run out of oxygen.
 - **Power Failure:** All power is lost, killing lights, computers, radio, radar, drives, and life support. If this isn't fixed quickly, the crew will have to abandon ship or die.
 - **Radiation Leak:** Dangerous radiation leaks from a reactor or other source. Crew without safety gear will take radiation damage.
 - **Stardrive Failure:** Warp, Jump, or Hyper-drive fails. The ship might be left sitting still, or flung into another dimension, or end up anywhere or *anywhen*.
 - **Weapons Failure:** A beam weapon fails, a missile jams in the launch tube, or a kinetic energy weapon misfires. The failure may be a backfire or explosion of the weapon itself, resulting in possible secondary damage.

Pyramid Review

GURPS Conspiracy X

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

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Original Concepts and Writing by **Rick Ernst, Shirley Madewell, Chris Palace**

288 pages; b&w softbound; \$30.00

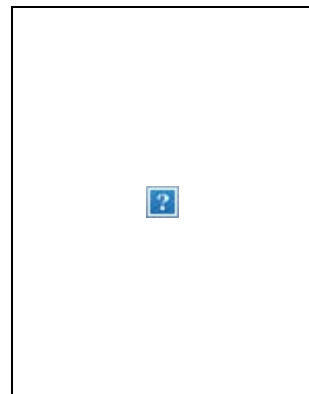
Steve Jackson Games is once again treading the licensing waters by giving Eden Studios, Inc. the go-ahead on *GURPS Conspiracy X*. The text of the setting has been brought into line with SJ Games' realistic mechanics, offering both old players and new some more options for their campaigns.

[CAMPAIGN SPOILER ALERT!]

If "They" have kept you in the dark, *Conspiracy X* is another in the seemingly endless line of game worlds plagued by a secret history. The Watch was formed to stop Hitler's occult victory in World War II, and it survived the war to pursue investigations into UFOs. The Watch discovered our globe was being buzzed by the alien Greys, and disagreements within the organization on how to approach these visitors caused a split.

Operation Dove attempted to contact the craft peacefully, while Operation Pigeon Shoot tried to shoot the vehicle down to research what could be mankind's worst enemies. The ship crashed in Roswell, and the resultant scramble to snatch up the wreckage further polarized the two factions. The peacemakers became an organization called Aegis while the aggressors became the National Defense Directorate, better known as Black Book.

Both groups hid themselves within various fledgling government agencies, using their contacts and influence to subvert personnel and resources to build their respective cabals. Aegis now inducts spies, soldiers, and even psychics to combat the alien menace, while the rival NDD has made tentative pacts with the alien races in hopes of bolstering their technological superiority -- and perhaps gaining the upper hand on their benefactors.



The mysterious and psychic Greys are only one antagonistic bloc. The violent, reptilian Saurians and the haughty and painfully perfect Atlanteans also vie for a piece of the pie, each with their own agenda. As if being sandwiched by hostile ETs wasn't enough, mankind's own psychic nature is polluting the planet -- becoming a semi-sentient phenomena known as the Seepage -- and it manifests itself as any and all of man's fears and superstitions, from magicians and witches to ghosts and werewolves.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

If you're a fan of the original *Conspiracy X*, you know most of this already. Marrying the setting to the *GURPS* system ("Powered by *GURPS*") adds another layer of verisimilitude to a game already steeped in "realism" (at least as far as the average character is concerned). The original mechanics were fairly simple (the cynical among us might say thin), and *GURPS* fills out a lot of the grainier aspects. The book doesn't embrace either system to the detriment of the other, so simplicity is still the watchword and the game retains a number of broad 1d6 mechanics for the old-school crowd.

The setting takes on a lot of eclectic subject matter, but the good news is it incorporates magic, psychic phenomena, and horror fairly seamlessly, with several surprises thrown in. The alien invasion background doesn't exactly blaze a lot of new paths, but it's coherent and, as far as campaigns go, an encouraging environment for GMs. More about the aliens and their plans or tactics would have been a boon to GMs hoping to see under the hood -- especially since they're the main attractions -- but we're given enough for a good start.

One of the really nice features of *Conspiracy X* is the cell system. Players create their adventuring party by deciding who works for which agency, who can bring certain resources to the table, and who can pull the right strings. Pulling Strings lets an Aegis agent finagle all manner of cool items or favors: commandeer a jet, send a cleanup team to wipe out all traces of an alien breeding lab, even secure the temporary use of a piece of alien technology. Everyone works together to develop the cell, which is a pivotal part of campaign creation since Aegis utilizes the "no one cell can compromise all the others" strategy.

Much useful information about various government agencies allows GMs and players alike to speak with some authority when discussing the jurisdictions and duties of those departments, a facet too often overlooked in games dealing with law enforcement. The weapons section is fairly brief, but only because there's a lot stuffed into the book. Alien technology, GM secrets, magic rituals, extensive notes on the paranormal, and a list of the bases a cell can outfit (and the strings they can pull) all take their toll on the page count. In some cases, they try to do a little too much, but completeness isn't one of the game's faults.

What one *can* fault the game for is confusion. For example, there's a section on the strings Aegis can pull, then Fright Checks and some character creation bits (though the cost to be a member of Aegis is before all that), and then some more strings to be pulled. These might not be Aegis-brand strings, but thematically they seem to deserve better than to be separated by other text. Creating a Sphere of Influence (those areas in which you can ask for favors and goodies) isn't hard, but the rules interlock in important ways that suffer from the arrangement (the paranormal material is similarly disjointed).

The appendix is careful to tell you which *GURPS* books are necessary (*GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition Revised*, and *GURPS Psionics*) and which may enhance the successful campaign, but more importantly the authors aren't shy about telling you what books you won't need. What information appears in which *Conspiracy X* tomes is spelled out so frugal gamers needn't blow their paycheck doubling up on redundant text; in fact, much of this book's text is copied almost word-for-word from the original *Conspiracy X*. The same goes for the artwork; Most of it is gorgeous, moody and atmospheric, and doubling up probably keeps costs down. Would that Eden Studios' index, often a big selling point for *GURPS* books, was as useful as those Steve Jackson Games produces. It's fairly full -- three pages worth -- but too many times it comes up short on key phrases.

Nothing short of a second edition is likely to clean up some of these problems, but it's still worth sifting through the text for the gems that raise *GURPS Conspiracy X* above many of its fellows. If you already have *Conspiracy X* you're not likely to get much additional insight (or material) from this new form. True, the conversion work has been done for you and there are more conversion notes in the back, but that doesn't take much of the sting out of the \$30 price

tag. If you're a newcomer to the setting, or if you want to facilitate grafting new material from the **GURPS** line onto your existing campaign, then it's a dandy buy.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

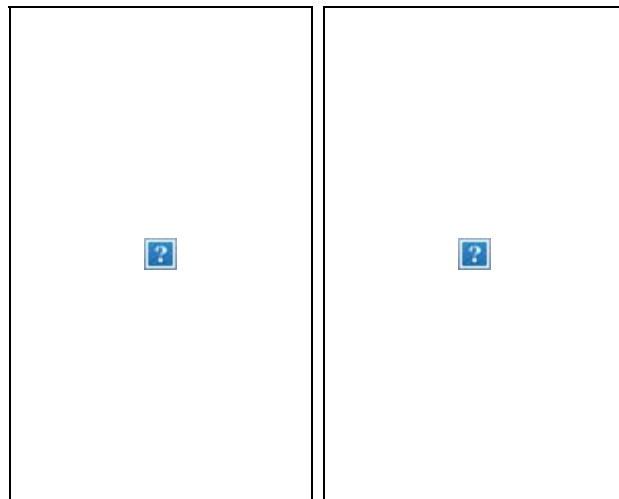
Pocket Universe Basic Rules Set

Teenage Demon Slayers -- Pocket Universe Campaign Book #1

Published by [UNIGames](#)

Written and Illustrated by Jeff Dee and 'Manda

18 7"x4" b&w pgs; \$4.95 each



Designer Jeff Dee has given us two games worthy of note. The first was *Villains & Vigilantes*, published by FGU in 1979 and was among the first superhero RPGs. The second was *The World's Easiest Role Playing System* (*T.W.E.R.P.S.*), which -- as the name implies -- has to have been the simplest RPG to date. For the twenty-first century, he has published a game that stands between these two in complexity, but which falls into the same price bracket as *T.W.E.R.P.S.* The *Pocket Universe* RPG line from UNIGames follows the model set by Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS*: Release a basic set of rules and then expand upon them with sourcebooks detailing particular genres and settings.

The first release is the Basic Rules Set, which comes in an odd little format -- 7" by 4" -- and slipped inside a ziplock bag. The tiny eighteen-page booklet is illustrated with just a single piece of artwork besides the portrait on the sample character sheet. That said, there really *is* little room for interior art in what is a simply laid out and clearly written game. Indeed, one has to say that the layout is rather reminiscent of the original *GURPS* rules and more so of its ancestor *Melee, Wizard and The Fantasy Trip*. The similarities don't end there, however . . .

A *Pocket Universe* character has four attributes: Physique (health, fitness and strength); Deftness, Intellect and Willpower. All of these scores begin at eight, with a player receiving ten points to spread between them. The average human score is ten, and no more than four points can be added to any single attribute. Players can select up to five points of advantageous traits, but must also take an equal number of disadvantageous ones. The negative traits seem rather limited and have too strong an in-game effect. They are perhaps too disadvantageous! Most mental disadvantages come under the Quirk label, which can be taken several times to reflect whatever mental aberrations a character might have. Oddly, while Gigantism is labeled a disadvantage, Small is an advantage.

Intellect determines a character's initial EPs (experience points) to spend on Skills, which like *GURPS* are keyed to the attributes that they are based upon. Just a single point on a skill provides basic proficiency equal to the attribute it is based upon. Thus a character with an Intellect of ten spending one point in the Scholar (History) skill would also make it ten. Another two points would raise the skill to intellect +1 or eleven. Finally equipment and contacts can be purchased to round the character off.

The game system is simple -- roll 2d10 and get a result equal to or under the appropriate attribute or skill. Critical results are achieved if doubles are rolled above or below the target. Opposed rolls are worked out by deducting ten from the defender's skill or attribute and using the remaining factor to modify the active player's skill or attribute.

Combat and movement is slightly miniatures oriented, but *Pocket Universe* keeps this in the background. The system is quick, and just complex enough to make combat ever so slightly challenging. What is interesting about combat in *Pocket Universe* is the method of determining both damage and initiative. Players note down three numbers each for

these. For example, if you hit someone with a war flail, which has a damage listing of 7/10/13, the player rolls a ten-sided die, doing 7 points of damage if they roll 1 or 2, 10 on a roll of 3 to 8, and 13 on 9 or 10. Rather nicely, the critical results table provides suggestions if the result rolled is not applicable, for example if you cause the foe to drop something and this is not possible, the table suggests that you knock them down instead.

A single sheet insert provides a character on the front and a sample adventure on the reverse. "Homecoming" takes place in the *WarChest* campaign setting, based upon the board game from Lance & Laser Models Inc. Designed for a party of 3 to 7 characters, this casts them as Locrian soldiers returning home after the Locrian army's defeat at the hands of Hykolarain Empire. Their hometown of Z|arikath is beset by bandits, and it is up to them to do the whole *Seven Samurai/Magnificent Seven* thing. This should provide an evening's worth of entertainment, as well as suggestions on creating dwarf characters.

It is difficult not to compare *Pocket Universe* with *GURPS* and its forebears, to which *Pocket Universe* compares favorably with *GURPS Lite*. Of course it is less detailed in places, but this is more from a lack of real space than the writing. So the question remains: What has a slightly old fashioned generic RPG got to offer over all of the other multitudes of games in your (well, my) collection? Firstly it is inexpensive; secondly it comes in a protective plastic bag; and thirdly, just like *GURPS*, for the sourcebooks (or should I say at the moment, the single sourcebook . . .)

Pocket Universe Campaign Book #1 is *Teenage Demon Slayers*. With a title like that, I can guess what you are thinking. And yes, it is inspired by a certain popular television series from which there is going to be an RPG coming out in Summer 2002.

Teenage Demon Slayers comes in the same format as the Pocket Universe core book and is likewise sparsely illustrated, but the cover by Manda captures the light-hearted feel of this setting. Because all of the core rules can be found in the *Pocket Universe* basic rules set, there is more room in *Teenage Demon Slayers* for background and setting material.

Teenage Demon Slayers takes place in our own world . . . specifically in any small town. Our world is beset by demons that all think that the Earth is a pretty nice dimension to visit. To combat them, the higher powers -- whoever they may be -- have appointed a small band of teenagers as slayers. There is not just a single slayer and their cohorts in a "scrappy gang"; rather all of the gang members are slayers, each with their own skills and abilities. These can be computer hacking, magic (the two-page magic supplement is available as a PDF document to download from the UNIGames website), the ability to receive visions as a seer, or even actually *being* half- or ex-demon.

Each group of slayers has an elder, which is an NPC that watches and guides them against demonic incursions. Elders are seasoned slayers who have retired from active demon hunting to help a new group. The catch in slaying demons is that most demons that holiday on Earth cannot be slain and are inevitably banished back to their home dimension instead. Of course, demons can still kill slayers, as can various demon-worshipping cultists (who slayers are forbidden from killing as well). Besides all this, teenage slayers must still attend high school, do their homework, take the dog for a walk and be nice to their siblings.

Characters in *Teenage Demon Slayers* are high school students, have a lower starting physique attribute compared with adults, have less initial experience points to buy starting skills, and fewer points for contacts. Appropriate new disadvantages include having strict parents or less allowance each week. New advantages include age -- because this provides extra allowance and means you are physically larger, having access to a larger room or a vehicle, being popular and (for fans of that certain series) being an ex-demon. The rules for creating demons or half-demons enable the GM to create their own demon NPCs and allow the players to give themselves special demonic abilities.

Teenage Demon Slayers adds 18 new skills to the *Pocket Universe* genre and where the basic rules concentrated upon the traditional fantasy setting, these new skills are for the modern day. There are new weapons suited to the genre, including the bazooka and M16 rifle, but a favorite will be the trusty stake, which comes in three sizes. The most useful new form of armor is the football kit and cyclist's helmet.

The GM receives four pages of advice on running a *Teenage Demon Slayers* game. After making a suggestion or two about setting up a game and elder NPCs, the guidelines concentrate on demon hunting, which is handled roughly like a

detective story and/or high school. This is really a primer on American high schools and thus useful for those who never went through the American school system. As each stage of an investigation is discussed, an example explains it well and as each one alludes to a single case, this exercise could easily be prepared as a ready to run scenario. Rounding out the booklet is a bestiary of nine demons and a vampire. Of course, once you have seen one vampire, you have seen them all, so demons *do* offer a little more variety. Once those in *Teenage Demon Slayers* have been exhausted, the GM can create their own, or raid any of the various books of demons and devils available for other game systems.

As with the *Basic Rules*, *Teenage Demon Slayers* comes with an insert. This is an adventure that fills both sides of the single sheet. "Strength In Numbers" has the team of slayers investigate a series of attacks by a strange "Monkey Beast" across town. There is more to this than meets the eye . . . unnaturally enough. But experienced gamers should be able to solve this introductory adventure in a couple of sessions or so.

Teenage Demon Slayers does not allow you to play your favorite young vampire hunters, for obvious reasons, but it nearly does. You can at least play something akin to them and that factor -- combined with the simplicity of the rules and the inexpensive nature of the basic rules and this first Campaign book -- means that this package is a decent choice until the real *Buffy the Vampire Slayer RPG* comes out.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



The Son of Cheeroonear

Part I

An Adventure for *GURPS*

by Jeremy Davies

It was late in the day when he found his daughter's feet lying on the ground like broken bark. Guayyanya noticed the small scar, a pink egg, a memory of an accident -- a spilt fire stick when she was still a babe. He didn't cry. He sighed and looked around slowly.

You didn't have to be a Clever Man to smell the death. There was blood, plenty blood, soaked into the earth. Claimed back for the Dreaming, the shells released by their spirits.

Consumed by the evil thing. It was a taint like rancid meat in the mouth. Guayyanya picked up one of the feet, the one with the familiar scar, and paced carefully into the shade of a ghost gum tree, its trunk as white as an old bone. His thoughts were veiled in simple questions.

How long would it go on? And is if in answer, they appeared again.

"Guayyanya. The time of Cheeroonear's son will come to its close soon." The spirits of the Winjarning brothers stood easily side by side. While one talked, the other gazed out at the horizon, behind or to either side. They were tall, and each carried a spear and waddie. Perfect formed men in shape, but empty eyes. The clouds shone through them. They were long-dead legends speaking through Dreaming. "You are the one that must help them fetch the tools. We have left them in No Fish Hole, protected by tests to prove them worthy. You will wait at Three Rock Spur. They will be white, like corpses dressed in clay, and they will have no Dreaming."

The brothers faded slowly into the heated air. Guayyanya said nothing. He was young for a Clever Man, but he never questioned the spirits. He took his daughter's foot and headed south, his life mapped out.

The evil lay deep in its cave, still consuming the Ngadjunma people from its mouth-sack. The killing was easy. Too easy. Next time, it thought, deep down in its dark funnel-like mind, I'll leave their Dreaming be . . .

"The Son of Cheeroonear" is a **GURPS** adventure designed for a party of four to six 100-point characters. It is set in the colony of Western Australia, in the summer of 1862. Characters can be from a variety of backgrounds: free-born Australian, released convict, American adventurer, English priest, Irish prospector . . . there are many possibilities. Either way, they will have little to no knowledge of the myths, rituals, and magics of the native Australians . . . those called "aborigines" by the west.

As written, the adventure is in the style of a Lovecraftian horror story; ancient and terrible magics meet percussion cap and sabre. GMs are, of course, welcome to adjust the adventure to suit their desires. **GURPS Time Travel** could see teched up researchers and soldiers of the future come back to study the period. A modern-day **GURPS Black Ops** setting would fit well also. In both cases, however, the NPCs' and "monsters'" powers would have to be increased somewhat to provide an adequate challenge.

An advertisement in the Fremantle Voice, 2 January, 1862

WANTED

A band of stout and dour men, not easily shrugged off by the fear of physical casualty, and quite able to themselves deliver such to those that would come against them; needed for inland expedition that promises a high return in profit and reward.

Those interested, meet at the Arms on Dally Road at noon, the fifth day of January.

A churchman, as spiritual guardian is also sought, with a full and equal share, guaranteed.

--Captain Albert P. Randolph

The Background

On the third of May, 1855, Albert Patrick Randolph -- an Assistant Surveyor for the colony of Western Australia -- stumbled across a gold reef while surveying an area 140 miles almost due north of a deserted sealing town called Esperance. He named the site beside a large lake "Albert's Luck" and made a note of its position. It was high-grade ore with a very high grain content. He collected some samples and went back to Fremantle, doing his best to conceal his excitement.

By the 30th of June, Mr. Randolph had organized a small private expedition to the area, claiming he had botanical interests in some unique desert flowers he had observed there. There were a suspicious amount of picks among his equipment for a flower search, but no one particularly noticed. After all, gold was a discovery of the east.

A young aborigine by the name of Brownie was hired as their guide. He was a warrior of the Ngadjunma tribe, but he became very agitated by the direction of the expedition as the days went on. A day's travel out from the site, he "went mad," mumbling such gibberish as "*Cheeroonear ha, Cheeroonear ha*" over and over. When the party tried to proceed, the man began screaming at them, even grabbing them to bar their way. One of the men beat him down with a spade and they left him for dead.

"Albert's Luck" proved to be as rich with gold as Albert had hoped. The six men worked hard for three days until they had too much gold for them to carry easily back through the harsh country.

That night, without any warning, the group were attacked by a fearsome creature: a giant dog-headed man, which pulled men limb from limb while they yet lived. Its strange see-through stomach-pouch was almost exploding with fluids, blood, and chewed human meat, which slowed the creature just enough to allow Albert's frenzied escape.

As he left, he heard the thing's terrible rasping voice roll over the silent gray night land:

"You return, white fella. You want after yellow rocks. When you back, I drink from your skull."

Albert managed to return to Fremantle with only one nugget of gold, which fetched a healthy 200 pounds. Not wishing

to be considered a madman, he told authorities that his party had been ambushed by blacks in an area well east of the actual site, not wanting his "gold mine" discovered by others. A squad of troopers were sent out, and a small band of Ngadjunma were "dispersed," which usually indicated a massacre.

It took Albert over five years to gather up enough courage to plan a new expedition. The lure of gold slowly ate away his primal fears. By the turn of 1862, he hatched himself a plan. He would lead a new party back to Albert's Luck, better equipped to deal with an "aborigine attack." He needed men who knew their way around firearms and violence, plus he would bring along a churchman (any sort would do), just in case the creature could not be repelled by lead alone. Albert assumes it is some form of demon or devil, so surely a stout man of honest faith could repel such a thing.

The Workers Arms Hotel and Storre Dally Road, Fremantle, Western Australia

The Arms is a somewhat hastily erected building, with stone corners and wood walls. It has dubious-looking gas lights hanging from the roof at various angles, and little else in the way of ornamentation. It serves a choice of thickly brewed beer or an almost lethal brew of "rum." It has several cheap rooms upstairs offering "settles' females a spot to rest whilst man is makin' house." It serves a thick stew three times a day, plus tea for the ladies.

On this noon day, Albert is sitting "out the back porch," which consists of a cleared area of dirt with some shade from a tortured-looking gum tree. He has a rough wooden chair up against the tree trunk, a stiff board with paper on it, and a pen. Dressed in a military red jacket, a dun pair of trousers and a black felt cap, he manages to look as though he has some authority.

About three times the amount of heroes in the group turn out, some of them looking like pretty desperate men. Many of them are convicts with tickets-of-leave; some may not even have that. After taking names and asking a few basic questions about each man's personal history, Albert dismisses a third of them. The remainders are split into two groups (the PCs and the NPCs) and he steps up gingerly to stand on his seat to address them.

"Um . . . good sirs. This expedition -- though its nature must remain a mystery for you now -- promises a large reward. The employment contracts that you will sign guarantee you a minimum return for your efforts of 2,000 pounds, in return for your unquestioned loyalty to me until return to Perth. It is a King's ransom I know, but I can assure you now -- and it is also written into the legal documentation -- that you will not be required to perform any criminal ventures. It is honest labor that I require, and organized protection against the savages. Although my last venture ended in a massacre at the hands of those heathens, I was not equipped -- in my Christian ignorance -- for military operations, as I shall be now with your assistance.

"You men, that I have decided are suitable for my course of action, must now prove yourself so. I have split you apart into two functional corps for a purpose, which I shall now explain. There is a ship in the harbor named *The Currency Lass* which I have chartered for my expedition. I will offer contracts, as I have discussed earlier, to the members of the group that first breasts the gangplank of said vessel. All members -- and I repeat again -- *all* members of the group must be accounted for. This method of testing will therefore on the one hand show me how resolute the men that make it up are, and on the other will prove their ability to act as a dedicated squad, which will be necessary when out in the God-forsaken bushland. The two rules of this test are as follows. Firstly, no killing. I am sure that the troopers will not intervene in our little game as long as a life is not taken. Secondly, you may not leave the Arms until the stroke of six; Murphy, the publican, shall police this rule. Failure to comply means no contract shall be offered.

"So I am clear? Any questions, not relating to the goal of this lawful journey?"

Albert will not give any further details, except to say that the ship is fully equipped with everything they may need, and that it sails tonight at half past six. If a priest presents himself (either a PC or an NPC), he is exempt from "the test" and will accompany Albert immediately to his "stateroom" for tea and contract signature. The lack of a priest will worry Albert a little, but not stop him from going.

From there, almost anything goes, short of outright murder. News regarding "the test" spreads like wildfire among the curious population of the frontier city of the west. It is strange, and has the potential of violence, so the Arms quickly fills up with gawkers and even a newspaper man or two. By six o'clock there are several hundred people gathered outside the Arms that can't fit within, not to mention a squad of twenty troopers with muskets that have been sent to see what the disturbance is all about. Irish uprisings are always considered a possibility whenever more than twenty or so workers gather together.

The troopers are unlikely to stop a good honest brawl, as long as no ladies or "gentry" (rich/military people) are threatened. They find the idea of two groups of hard cases punching the snot out of each other while they try to chase some mad sun-crazy new-chum pommie bastard on some fool quest for god-knows-what the height of entertainment just like the next bloke.

The adventurers might notice that there is no rule against beginning to "whittle down the numbers" of the opposing group before the clock strikes six, just that they can't leave the building until that time. If they in anyway immobilize the other men, some of their mates might take a dim view of it.

The unofficial leader of the NPC team, Arnold "Red Belly" Thompson, has a simple strategy for his group. They plan to wait until the start time and then run on mass to the door, fighting anyone in their way . . . just keep on moving in a group, fighting as they go and running when they can.

If the PC team loses the test, they may feel compelled to follow the *Currency Lass* at a distance. Wherever this new chum's going, there must be heaps of money. Maybe a Welsh shipowner named "Cauliflower" Kirkton might offer the use of his vessel for such a purpose . . .

By Sea to Esperance

The Currency Lass is an old whaling schooner, a veteran of over thirty years along the south coast of Australia and the waters of Van Diemens Land. Any adventurer with seamanship skills will soon realize that it is quite seaworthy, though it is heavily weighed down with wool bales, and a team of eight camels . . . to the point that rough weather could make the vessel quite unstable. Others will just think that it all seems rather crowded.

Albert will welcome the winning team aboard and promptly take them to his "stateroom" below decks (a small storeroom containing one chair, one stool and about forty bags of grain). Here he will produce the contracts for the party's perusal and mark. The contracts are reasonably straightforward, though worded heavily in legal jargon. Two thousand pounds is offered but a number of penalties are outlined that can cause the forfeiture of some if not all of the payment: insolence, insubordination, lethargy, malingering, or cowardice. A smart reader (or someone with Law skill) may find an interesting clause buried deep beneath the layers of wherefores and henceforths: "The undersigned will have no legal claim upon such items retrieved by the company . . ." Anyone wishing to protest regarding the contracts will be told that they are welcome not to sign . . . but could they please ask the other group to come aboard on their way off the ship?

Albert's "aborigine advisor" enters the stateroom. He is a tall black man with loose hair and rough hewn trousers cut back to shorts. Apart from this he wears across one shoulder a kangaroo skin pouch of some sort. "Two Bob Snooze" had been in Fremantle several months before learning about "Albert's Luck" through reading the man's diary when he was asleep one night. He dressed like a bush native and offered his services as a local guide. In fact, he plans on killing everyone once the gold is found. His two pistols and bowie knife are in his pouch. Meanwhile, he tries his best to play the role of a native advisor.

Note that the "Two Bob Snooze NPC" is not essential to the plot. Feel free to simply use a straight guide (use native

stats below), no guide at all, or even allow "Two Bob" to be played as a PC.

Another vessel puts out just after the *Lass*, containing Red Belly and his men. They realize that Albert must be on to something big to be offering the kind of pay he was, so they arranged -- through a Welsh shipowner named "Cauliflower" Kirkton -- to follow at a decent distance to see where they put aground. From there they intend to follow the group.

Fremantle is a reasonably busy port, so it is not unusual for two or more ships to be in sight of one another. If the captain of the *Lass* is asked to take a look at the pursuing vessel, he will express some interest, as he thought the *Llewellyn's Pride* was not due to sea for another fortnight.

If the party does nothing, they will have an uneventful cruise to Esperance checking their equipment and wondering where they are going. Albert will tell them nothing. Two Bob pretends to be an ignorant savage as much as he can.

If the *Currency Lass* turns about to face its pursuer, they may be in for a surprise. Red belly's "gang" has swelled in numbers by 50%. They can either fight it out on the high seas or speed away in their faster vessel to reach Esperance before them. Albert will ask the advice of the group and go with whatever they think is best. On one hand he doesn't want a hostile group behind him; on the other, he could try to lose them once they land and thus not be delayed at sea.

Esperance . . . A Ghost Town?

Esperance was a small township that serviced the seal and whaling industry up until the 1840's when the animals "dried up." Once a small hive of activity with Van Dieman's Landers (Tasmanians), Americans, and French whalers, now only three ramshackle buildings remain upright; several others have fallen to the sandy ground in heaps.

It is an hour or two from sunset when the ship rounds the gentle cove. Albert brings his "team" together on deck for a briefing.

"Men. After disembarking from this vessel -- and you will assist with the careful handling of our animals and tack -- we will occupy one of the vacant buildings and remain for the evening. I will tell you now what my intent is, and that be to travel inland for several days, where we shall find . . . the . . . *object* of our quest. *The Currency Lass* has some commercial duties to perform further east at Eucla, but she shall be awaiting us when we return; I have a solemn pledge."

The captain of the *Lass* approaches one of the adventurers and hands him a small (three inches by three inches) cotton-covered cube of Turner & Sons American tobacco.

"They'll be a black fella there who'll be wantin' this, see. It'll mean a safe journey for tha ship. Probl'y save your skins to, make ya path a li'l easier will Bishop."

Several ships captains know of Bishop T'bakka who resides in the Esperance ghost town. He's an old *wirinun*, a "clever fella" (Clever Man or witch doctor) with a taste for tobacco. The sailors, being superstitious lots, firmly believe that he can control the winds and seas between Esperance and Eucla. When they pass by, they throw a cube of tobacco over the side in a watertight bag so that it will wash ashore and keep the old clever fella happy.

If the *Currency Lass* lost no time, it will arrive in Esperance on a golden afternoon. The *Pride*, though still visible on the horizon, will not reach the cove until just before noon the next day. Make the players tense about the mysterious ship; they might even want to set an ambush for its arrival, though Albert will not want to waste time.

The players assist in organizing the camels onto a penned barge (Animal Handling could come in handy here, or some camels may be lost) and the unloading of all the equipment: the tack and solid wood and wicker saddle baskets, the spades, picks and shovels, dried food and water sacks, the tents, and other paraphernalia. Once done, the captain of the *Lass* bids everyone a safe journey and sails east.

The building selected by Albert as the "base camp" appears to have been a store of some sort. A faded sign, once painted red, says, "Brooks Inn an Genral Storr. Wipe ya feet!" Its vertical slab wood walls shake noticeably in the stiff southerly that's blowing sand up through the broken windows. When the sun drops, the temperature goes with it, and the wind builds up stronger.

It is cold inside, even with a fire going.

After midnight some time, Bishop T'bakka comes strolling in. If a sentry is posted, a Contest between his IQ (+/- Alertness) and Bishop's effective Stealth (20 in a tribal area) must be won to spot him. (Danger Sense will not work because he is not a danger).

Otherwise he walks into the middle of all the sleeping bodies and yells, "*Nngarra ngarra a mismoo gip lommee ngadjunma!*" at the peak of his ancient shrill voice. (Give one player a Vision roll to notice Two Bob pulling a very well maintained revolver out of his "native bag." If it goes unnoticed, he slips it back in when he realizes there is no danger.) The players should react with great surprise; Bishop is fully dressed in red and white ochers, which shine brightly in the moonlight. After shouting read this description to the rudely awakened adventurers, or the sentry that spotted Bishop's approach:

"Shining with an otherworldly luminance is a macabre parody of a human skeleton, animated with bizarre energy. There are bones where bones should not be, criss crossing about the black spaces of the middle of the room like broken ribs. The thing shrieks out again and its handless arms wave around above its half-head."

After a few seconds, with eyes adjusting to the dark, they will see the body around the paint. Hopefully, no-one will open fire, but in the dark they should miss and stop when they realize the "thing" is not attacking them.

Albert, succumbing to sheer primal terror, has disappeared.

Bishop, after introductions, will settle down for a chat.

"Bee' spectin' you fella for'a while now. Y'know ya come down here is got my business, ha! No ya don't, ha!, no you don't! I know, ya know wha'. I know it." He laughs hysterically. He turns to the person that was given the tobacco (if it hasn't already been given to him). "Ya got my t'bakka, ha?" If the player doesn't give up the tobacco (the cube is worth at least two pounds), Bishop will shrug and say: "Can't 'elp you fella, hey?" and he will leave. If he gets it, he will laugh again for some time and produce a pipe from his small bag. A minute later he has the pipe fully loaded and puffing smoke from his nose.

"You fellas good fellas and come here ready fo' business, hey? That my business too, ya know? I show ya necks day what ya want t'ave. You finish this dreamin', then you whi' fella pick up them rocks, ha! Whi' fella business, Ha?"

It might occur to the party to try and have Bob talk to the man, to make more sense of him. Two Bob will say that the dialect is wrong, tribal differences etc. Bishop will cut in:

"'im! 'im! fella got no dreamin', ha! 'im not here, fella got no dreamin', jus' like you whi' fella, no dreamin' He los' the dreamin' long back." Two Bob will say this is just a way of expressing tribal differences.

About now someone should notice that Albert is missing. When Bishop made his dramatic entrance (or was hailed by the sentry) the terrified Englishman leapt through one of the missing windows and ran headlong into the surrounding bush, all his fears from the last excursion revisited. He was certain that the beast had come for him. He is lost in the scrub within minutes and rolled up into a fetal position beneath the roots of a tree; almost two miles away. He stays there, silently for the next two days, too terrified to move until thirst drives him back to the settlement, pale and very shaken, his sanity holding on by a slim thread.

The party will probably want to mount a search. Two Bob will suggest reading the man's diary, which has a small forcible lock. If it is broken open, they will learn all about the previous expedition, referring to Cheeroonear ha as "the thing" or the "creature" or the "demon." It does not describe it though, and though it details the large amount of gold at

Albert's Luck (which he reckons to be worth over two million pounds), it says nothing about its position. That information is locked safely away in his head.

Either way, Bishop will advise against searching for the man in his own strange way.

"I know where he wen' fella, poor fella. Poor fella". He shakes his old gray head slowly. "I take you fella to 'im business. Then you finish it, ha?"

The players will probably assume he means to take them to where Albert is or to the gold reef. Bishop will sleep quietly in a corner until morning, then he will lead the party to *Ngarra Tijjallara*, No Fish Hole.

No Fish Hole

About 25 miles northeast of the town is Ngarra Tiljjallara, a subterranean tunnel that descends at about a 30-degree angle for ten yards or so, then becomes an underwater cave. The entry point is narrow, barely two feet in diameter. and the is water freezing cold and pitch black.

On arrival, Bishop refuses Bob entry to the cave (which suits Bob just fine). Bishop says:

"List'n now hey fella. This both ar business, hey? This where Winjarning boys put the business 'im nee', ya know tha'? Winjarning in dreamtime put 'im in no fish hole fo' you fella to finish, hey? You fella swim in that, you fin' that business. You finish dreamin' an' pick up plenty rocks, hey? Plenty pretty whi' fella rocks."

If pressed, Bishop will tell the party that he knows where the rocks are as well, but they need what's down the hole first.

Swimming into the unknown in total blackness is no mean feat (claustrophobes can forget about it). The cave narrows to a rough-edged 22 inches, dropping down to almost vertical for about twelve feet before slowly rising and widening for another twenty yards, then reaching the inner cave and some much needed air. The players won't know it, but the actual distance is not too long for an average man to cover while holding breath (24 yards) considering a HT of 10 allows for 40 turns (HT x 4) which at average swimming speed gives the character 40 yards to travel (Swimming speed 1 for 1/10 Swimming skill round down). There are, however, further complications.

- **Cave width.** Certainly the thinner the character, the less likely he will become snagged on a jagged rock to drown. The roll for an average build man (5'11", 150 lbs.), stripped naked, to avoid snagging is 13 or less. The GM should modify this up or down depending on whether he believes the characters build is slimmer/thicker and whether he wears clothes that might catch on edges (up to -1 for underwear to -6 fully clothed). Once snagged, a Will roll is needed to avoid panic. An unpanicked character can make a ST roll to unsnag, but each attempt takes five seconds. It is important that the GM keeps track of this because it will effect the amount of air time the character has to reach the end. Due to the narrowness, it is impossible to turn around until ten yards from the end.
- **Panic.** (Ignore for Unfazeable characters.) Three Will rolls are required to be made before reaching the end (as well as any snag induced Will rolls). For game terms consider the rolls to be made every seven yards. Once a character panics in the ink black waters, they lose all their air and begin to drown (p. B91). The players may think to tie a rope to the leg of the intrepid diver in an effort to save them in the case of trouble. This is a good idea in one way (it may save someone from drowning) but it is important for GMs to keep in mind that the rope itself could become snagged (see above); it may also be difficult to tell whether the diver is in trouble so he may be pulled back for no reason. The rock walls are also very sharp, with shells and jagged edges. For every two yards the diver is pulled backward, he would sustain 1d-2 cutting damage. The GM should feel free to increase this up to 1D depending on the "rescuers" pull speed.
- **Confusion.** (Ignore for Absolute Direction.) Once the player reaches the end, the test is not over. Disorientation caused by a darkened underwater swim has left the diver unable to tell the difference between up and down. After the 24 yards are covered, an IQ roll modified by Alertness must be made to surface. If failed, the character continues to swim about in wide circles at the bottom of the pool, thinking that the passage has simply widened.

Allow one roll every 2 rounds, and remember to keep track of time for drowning purposes.

The Winjarning Cave

Once the diver/s has surfaced he will find a six foot high granite wall jutting out of the water. This is a -3 Climb. There is light emanating from above the wall, which casts a very low, gloomy aspect to the gray-black walls of this natural chamber. Describe a skull bobbing up in the water to heighten the effect. It was from a previous failed attempt to swim through the passage and has been disturbed.

Once up the ledge, the light is brighter, and seems to be coming from the roof further up. There is a passage as if cut through the stone, but everything here has a somber untouched air about it, the air of antiquity. This is an ancient place, and has not been set upon for thousands of years.

With the light above, an Alertness check is required not to simply fall straight down a deep ravine! (Unless, of course, clever characters plan ahead . . .) The ground is black on black. The other side of the ravine is twelve feet away, and there is about ten feet of run up distance before the edge. See the rules for running broad jump (p. B88). Climbing would be extremely difficult, even with the right equipment, but not impossible; 120 feet of sheer stone would have to be negotiated on either side.

Finally, after the tests of the physical feats have been met by a true champion, the inner cave can be reached. The cave is small (ten feet across) and circular; it is almost a perfect sphere apart from its entry point. The roof shines with a vaguely green luminous light. The stones that give off this light are crystals that are warm to touch, but once touched by human hand (or removed from the rock wall) slowly fade in a minute or so. Nestled squarely within view are the Winjarning waddies and boomerang (see below).

This cavern feels warm and is great comfort to any character within it, as if their soul was taking a spa bath and neck massage. Any person that stands within the chamber for five rounds receives the Honesty disadvantage (only removable by a Wirinun). Any conflicting disadvantages (Kleptomania, Pyromania, illegal drug Addictions, etc.) are removed. If an Honest character enters, they will be overcome by the positive energy of the place and receive a +2 bonus to all rolls for one month.

As long as the character picks up all three items and remains in the inner cavern for five rounds, a sudden dizziness will come upon him. The world seems to shift. A cold wind blows about and all the hairs of his body stand on end . . .

. . . and the character will awaken at the mouth of the cave, in the midday sunlight. Others would suggest that he must have found another exit and maybe the stress of the events got to him and he collapsed and has forgotten . . . Anyway he's back now. Somehow.

Bishop smiles frequently at the one who recovered the Winjarning tools. He now calls the character *Naggarra igh arriguh*, which means "he that gets the tools." They will prove very useful in the conflict against *Cheeroonear ha* (see Part II).

If the characters fail to procure the items for whatever reason, Bishop will be very sad and withdrawn, muttering to himself and shaking his head slowly. Once back at Esperance he will be gone the next time no eyes are on him. He will be untraceable.

Return to Esperance

Meanwhile, Red Belly and his crew have landed (presuming they weren't dealt with earlier) and taken Albert prisoner. They have tortured him and/or read his diary and know the goal of the expedition. And this time they've got guns.

Red Belly's lone guard at their expedition camp has a Vision of 8 due to mild intoxication. The rest of the party has Albert, and is moving towards the gold. If Red Belly is killed or captured, the others will soon give in and offer to join

in with the other party. Albert has almost completely lost his marbles by this stage, and is barely able to hold his concentration together long enough to reply coherently to any questions. The one thing driving him on is the memory of the gold reef; it is like a beacon in his darkened mind. When asked about the direction to the gold, he will seem to get himself together, his eyes focusing just a little. He will consult his compass and begin to walk, almost oblivious to his paid employees. Other than that, any questions or requests for leadership will be met by blank stares to the north, or faint, unintelligible jabbering.

Keep in mind that any Honest character will now only kill as a last possible option. He will try to capture any "criminals" (including other PCs) and detain them for later prosecution by the relevant authorities.

Two Bob will say he cannot get involved in white men's squabbles, and claim to not be able to use a gun or fight . . . unless (of course) his secret is already out. In this case he will fight, albeit reluctantly; he would not, however, be above attempting to eliminate one or two of the tougher characters if such an opportunity was to present itself.

The Trail to Albert's Luck

The PCs will need to take over the expedition, unless Red Belly and his group kicked their butts, in which case they'll be trailing on behind no doubt, looking for a chance of ambush, if any are left alive. Albert is a zombie and no use to anyone except as the human compass to get the party to the gold.

With all of the equipment and foul tempered camels, an average of twenty miles a day can be made through the harsh, windswept plains of the Nullarbor. The first leg of the journey takes two days and ends in a lake; so does the second leg of roughly the same distance. Lake Gilmore is a short 10 miles or so north of this second lake, and the expedition follows the western side north. From the northern tip of this lake it is about 20 miles to the southern tip of Lake Cowan, where the nestled alcove of water named Albert's Luck awaits.

The following events may occur randomly, or when desired by the GM for game effect.

- A Ngadjunma war party attacks; they seek vengeance for the dead of their tribe that fell in the attack from the soldiers who responded to Albert's (false) tale. If the heroes think of it, and as long as Bishop is still with them, they may try to parley, telling them the truth about how they are not responsible for that lie. If so, they will still require someone as a "blood debt" to the tribe. (Any white man would do for this purpose, though no Honest character would allow this to happen.) The person will be taken away and thrown off a cliff, after having both legs speared through.

The group could consist of anywhere between ten and twenty men. They will continue to attack until a third of their numbers are wounded or killed; then they will retreat. They will then attempt to follow the group, sneaking up to launch spears in the night.

- A sandstorm erupts. Shelter will be scanty at best, and the camels will want to bolt. Firearms will also become less reliable from this point. Double the Malfunction chances, even if precautions are taken to protect the weapons.
- Albert's mental state deteriorates from day to day. He does not sleep, but keeps glancing at his notes and compass, chattering away to himself. He seems to know where he's going, but after a few days travel he begins to wander off at night, as if he no longer knows the others are with him. The players may need to tie him up for his own safety. If so, he won't struggle much, and when allowed to move freely, will still gladly continue onward, as if guided somehow.

Albert's Luck

Albert's Luck is a small alcove at the southern base of Lake Cowan. One day, a town called Norseman will evolve around the site, but right now it is little more than sandy rock and spindly scrub, with gnarled, claw-like trees that twist their way toward heaven. There are several small billabongs or rockpools about, though the place is unnaturally

silent.

The group will reach the area at nightfall, so a camp is set. Albert, if still alive, is either tied firmly up, or rolling about on the ground gibbering like a deranged lunatic. By the time some damper has been cooked and tea laid out, he calms a little and sits.

During the night, *Cheeroonear ha* ventures out of his lair to kill Albert. He will attempt to sneak up and use his decapitation technique, trying to make good on his promise to drink the contents of Albert's skull. He will not attack the party unless attacked himself at this stage, and if attacked, he will make a fighting retreat to gather his dogs. He will offer this warning:

"You leave here now, and the night will be your shield. If you wait until morning, I will come again and crack open your spines to feast on its tender marrow. You have my promise."

The voice is a rasping terrible tone, like a jagged cement block being scraped across a gravestone. It is worth Fright checks to all that hear it.

If the characters are still there in the morning, *Cheeroonear ha* will send his dogs to attack at the break of dawn. They will creep up as close as they can to the campsite before striking, if possible at different angles simultaneously.

Cheeroonear ha will wait about thirty minutes before sneaking up himself to see how his dogs have done. If confident that the fight went well, he will not bother to hide his approach; otherwise he will sneak up to attack, or maybe even flee if he considers the party too strong. He knows nothing about the *Winjarning* weapons.

The Return and Repercussions

There are many possible outcomes to the adventure. If *Cheeroonear ha* and his dogs triumph, and any characters escape, they may wish to return and try their luck again. If they didn't have "the tools," they might think to go back and try for them.

If *Cheeroonear ha* is defeated, the GM may allow the characters to "strike it rich." This would (of course) alter history. Laurie Sinclair's horse, *Norseman*, would not be the unofficial discoverer of a gold reef in 1894 after all, and the Western Australian gold rush would begin 30 years early. A rough estimation of gold values at the time would give a return of around 1 lb of gold equaling 290 pounds. The entire reef contains about 2,800 lbs of concentrate and 6,000 lbs of ore. With the cost of refinement etc, ore is worth approximately one quarter of concentrate price. This puts the value of the reef at around 1,260,000 pounds total. With the equipment available on this expedition (8 camels carrying gold with no riders), the weight of gold that could comfortably be removed immediately would be around the 1000 lb mark, yielding around 225,000 pounds back at Fremantle, allowing for a small mixture of ore with prime-picked concentrate material.

If the GM doesn't want the gold to fall into the characters eager pockets, a massed *Ngadjunma* war party may attack on the way back with enough men to force an unencumbered retreat. A chase through the arid fields of the Nullarbor -- characters in pursuit of runaway camels and aborigines in pursuit of invaders -- would provide for an entertaining sequence (though most camels have a knack of loosing their loads once they bolt . . .). Or Bishop *t'bakka* could warn them of a curse against the removal of the gold. It would cause a wasting sickness until returned to its rightful place . . . or until the thief dies a slow painful death. The adventurers could begin to fall sick slowly on the return to convince them. Then there may be some way to remove the curse; Bishop might know of some other tools, somewhere, in a mountain area, where the *Keeng Keengs* used to live in the *Dreamtime* . . .

When the *Currency Lass* returns, there is a surprise on board . . . a surprise for Two Bob, anyway. A group of bounty hunters, and two New South Wales police constables, have tracked down their quarry: the outlawed Two Bob Snooze. Two Bob's reaction would be governed by his impression of how the party feels toward him. If he thinks they'll stand by him, he'd try and feed them some concocted story about being "wrongly accused" of killing some homicidal convict overseer to elicit support. If not, he'll run. He might have spotted the men on the deck and get a head start; he might

have jumped straight from the gangplank into the foamy sea. (Maybe he drowned? Maybe not.) The characters might join the chase: 500 pounds, dead or alive. Or maybe Two Bob will chase *them* for his share of the gold . . .

Another surprise will await them back at Fremantle. Albert, being a surveyor and having an understanding of the law, staked a claim to an area of land which of course included Albert's Luck. Therefore, by law, all minerals found in said area belong to him and now become a part of his estate . . . though they are still entitled to the 2,000 pounds owing to them for their service. The players might make a claim of finding the gold they have with them elsewhere (sure to raise questions and a rush to the area). Albert's next of kin, Hubert, a younger brother in California would sure like to know about this claim. Maybe he'll find out and need guides? Maybe the characters will try and "sit" on their find and go back for more (look out for Honest John!).

The richness, color, and depth of the Wild Colonial Boy period of Australia's history is fertile with as many strange twists and turns as an imaginative GM can devise. Just think *A Fistful of Dollars*, but the people love the outlaws and hate the law. There is magic but it seems to work upside-down. If it looks good it might kill you and the cultural roller coaster just crested the rise.

And there might be a break in the line.

Part II, next week, will detail the special items found in the cave, and NPC and creature stats.

Pulling Back the Curtain . . .

We Learn The Wizard Is The *Player!*

Okay; this one resides in my ol' brain cells as the *other Torg* story. I wasn't even involved, but heard it from my friend. And it's not something that happened in game, but was rather contemplation *about* what happened. And it's not even that funny. And the dog ate my homework, and coffee may be hot.

In the *Torg* game, the primary way the great war in the universe will be won is by the adventurers telling stories of their heroic deeds, inspiring the war-torn people of Earth to be filled with the possibility of hope. The way those heroic deeds were quantified in the rules was by the players rolling 60+ on a roll (on a 20-sided die; you get to add and reroll 10s and 20s), and then by playing a Glory card from a player's hand. So they're somewhat rare, and once those conditions were met, it was assumed that the object of that roll was truly heroic and tale-worthy.

In one game, the players *did* manage to naturally roll their 60+, play their Glory card, and create a truly epic-inspired event . . .

. . . on an Evidence Analysis roll.

So the players got to thinking about how, exactly, this Glorious tale was going to go:

HERO: Okay; so after hours of fighting, we entered the deep underground lair's final chamber. And there in that chamber was our final adversary: A giant hulking monstrosity, intent on killing us all. Clearly, this was to be the battle of our lives. And he was guarding . . . some *evidence!*

AUDIENCE: Oooooohhhh!!!

HERO: To say this was a tense moment would be a grand understatement. I mean, we *needed* that evidence. And even if we acquired it, would we be able to discern its meaning? The fate of the world lay in the balance. The evidence was strewn in front of us, and we stood there, puzzled . . . what did it all mean?

[TWENTY MINUTES LATER]

HERO: . . . And finally we *figured out the evidence!*

AUDIENCE: Whoa!!!!

DOE-EYED LITTLE GIRL: But . . . but . . . what happened to the bad guy?

HERO: Oh, we whacked him. Anyway, once we'd figured out the evidence . . .

(They later clarified the rules so that heroic stories could only be done by, say, doing heroic things.)

I told you that anecdote so I could tell you this one.

Once upon a time I was running a miniseries with a player who seemed pretty darn incompatible with my gaming style.

This point was driven home most clearly when there was a dramatic scene where a young girl was the sole survivor of an attack that killed her entire family. The girl had some information the party needed so they could continue their investigation.

Anyway, this player said, "I comfort the girl."

"Umm . . . okay," I said. "And how do you do that?" I wanted the player to elaborate on exactly what he was doing . . . y'know, maybe try to get him to *roleplay*.

"Well, I have exceptional skills in Empathy and Persuasion, and I'm very attractive. I'm using them to comfort her."

"But *how*?" I asked. "What, exactly, are you doing or saying?"

"Um . . . I go over to her and say . . ." He struggled. " 'There, there.' " He made a pat-patting motion on his shoulder with his hand.

" 'There, there'?" I repeated. "As in, 'There, there . . . You've just witnessed some eldritch horror rend your mother, father, brother, and sister limb from limb, then burn your house to the ground. Want some ice cream?'"

"Um, sure." He rolled his dice. "Looks like I did pretty well; what does she tell us?"

After the conclusion of that miniseries, I somehow forgot to invite him back for further games.

Anyway, I told those stories partly because they eat up gobs of my contractually obligated weekly word count, but mostly to make a point regarding the curtain between players and characters. That's right; this is part two of my series begun [last week](#) regarding the separation of player and character experiences and knowledge. (I bet you thought I'd forgotten!)

Last week I discussed the advantages and disadvantages of a thick curtain. This week I'm looking at having a thin curtain between the two.

If I were creating a list of my top five troubles with my own roleplaying -- both as a GM and a player -- number four or five would probably be problems with immersion. Because there's a dirty little secret in roleplaying games: Roleplaying isn't *really* necessary.

When you consider it, it's entirely possible for a game to look like this:

GM: You encounter an orc.

PLAYER 1: I hit him with my sword. I rolled a 3.

PLAYER 2: I attack him with my axe. I rolled a 17.

GM: Player 1, you miss. Player 2, you hit. You do enough damage to kill the orc. There is a prisoner in this room: A little girl. She is terrified and hiding.

PLAYER 1: I attempt to comfort her. I have the "Persuasion" ability. I rolled a 13.

GM: Okay; you were able to calm the girl down. Relieved to be rescued, she hands you a map she stole from the orcs.

PLAYER 2: We look at it.

GM: You can't figure it out.

PLAYER 2: I use my "Evidence Analysis" ability on the map. I rolled a 5.

GM: You can't figure anything out.

PLAYER 1: I have "Evidence Analysis" as well; I rolled a 19.

GM: Okay; you figured out that there was a cipher that required the map to be folded in half before it was readable. The map refers to a treasure hoard buried about 10 miles away. You are able to go there, if you'd like.

PLAYERS: Let's go!

Now, if everyone is having fun then this isn't a problem. But, technically speaking, this probably isn't *roleplaying*, any more than playing a computer RPG where you control a party whose abilities and skills are entirely transparent. In such games, if a member of your party has the Analyze Artifact skill at a high enough level, they'll figure out how to use the object they need; otherwise they'll need to go on a subquest or figure out a way to raise someone's skill level. Regardless, the adaptation of a role is entirely optional, and not required for the game to be playable nor for all

challenges to be overcome.

Once you realize this, the appeal of a thinner curtain becomes a bit more obvious. No, you can't expect your players to pick up swords and start hitting you (unless you've given them a *really* stupid puzzle). But you *can* provide them opportunities to use their own abilities as players instead of their abilities as characters.

If they -- as players -- can provide a sufficiently stirring speech to the troops before going into battle, why would you *need* a Leadership roll?

If a player figures out that you're describing symptoms of radiation poisoning in a mysteriously sick character, why not let him have that victory instead of waiting until the dice dictate that his character figures it out, too?

If the players can figure out that the handwriting sample on the ransom note you've handed them is identical to the handwriting on the check used to pay them, why deny them that victory?

The potential for immersion is probably the biggest appeal of a thin curtain between the player and character experience. If they know they will be rewarded as a group by paying attention to clues, making dramatic speeches, or drawing their real-world knowledge into the game, then the odds are pretty good the players will be more immersed in the experience; this will (hopefully) make the game more fun for everyone.

Of course, there are potentials for real problems with a thin curtain:

"You didn't see the clue . . . so you *die*!!!"

If I've stressed one thing over and over to this approach, it's that you *must* provide an "escape plan." If the players can't figure out the puzzle left by Rebusman, then it's imperative that the *characters* be given a chance to solve it . . . probably through dice.

Likewise, if the heroes are embroiled in a murder mystery, the characters should be given a chance to notice that the maid lied when she said she got mail on Sunday, even if the players missed that clue.

Depending on the game, all that may be necessary is to give partial clues to the players. For example, rather than saying, "Your character realizes that the maid had to be lying because there is no mail delivery on Sunday," you can say, "There was something odd about what the maid said she did this morning; your analytical mind will eventually figure it out, but it might take some time. (Of course, if you figure it out as a player, you were smarter than you thought . . .)" That way you're still encouraging the player to sort it out -- and providing a reward for doing such -- but he can be confident that his character will get the answer eventually.

"That doesn't make any sense!"

Thog the Dull probably shouldn't be able to make a speech of Elizabethan elegance simply because his player is a Shakespearean scholar. Aaaaa The Asexual Alien probably shouldn't recognize symptoms of human pregnancy if it's never encountered an expectant woman before. And the grizzled 19th-century prospector shouldn't understand that the reason he's getting sick is because his mine also has significant uranium deposits.

When people react against a thin curtain between player and character experiences, I suspect this is what they are most afraid of. The player who threatens to disrupt the suspension of disbelief by exhibiting some "forbidden" knowledge -- whether it's an understanding of history his character wouldn't possess, a use of skills or abilities his character shouldn't (cryptography, oratory), or knowledge of the adventure the GM is running -- is seen by many as a Very Bad Thing.

Well . . . yeah, it could be. But players could also make adding mistakes on character sheets, or weigh dice to roll better; this doesn't mean they *will*, nor does it mean that character sheets or dice should be chucked because something bad might happen. If everyone is agreeable to the idea of a thinner curtain between player and character, then it

probably wouldn't hurt to establish some ground rules. ("Don't be a jerk" is a personal favorite; in other words, if drawing on non-character knowledge hurts the game -- like using information from an adventure the GM is running, or arguing some minutia of criminal law for an hour because you're in law school and neither the GM nor the other players are, or complaining that "this isn't how it is in the books" because the GM is interpreting the game world in a different way -- then that's being a jerk, and will result in Swift and Severe Punishment. Should there be interest, I can describe some other rules in a future column . . .)

Now, if people are afraid that the smart/eloquent/clever characters will be overshadowed by the smart/eloquent/clever *players* . . . well, although it's a danger (see below), I'm not sure it's as big a problem as some might believe. In fact, we need look no further for assurance than the pinnacle of Western Civilization: the *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Rings* motion picture.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

In this work there is a scene where the heroes are gathered around a door. Said door has a riddle inscribed over it . . . a riddle so basic that several of the babies born in the theatre during my screening gave the answer as their first words. Despite its relative simplicity, Gandalf -- the *smart* one of the group -- was unable to figure it out. Finally, after a few hours had passed (I won't spoil whether this is in movie time or real time) Frodo "figures out" the answer and reveals it. The door opens. The movie continues. (My personal theory is that everyone knew the answer, but they didn't want to risk the wizard's ire by trumping him.)

Anyway, by the numbers the wizard *should* have known the answer. And left to dice alone there's a fair chance he would have known the answer. But dramatically it's perhaps a bit more interesting to let other people solve such problems every so often.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

And it might even be "realistic" for someone unexpected to triumph (in the sense that it's not terribly unrealistic); history -- both global and personal -- often provides examples where people who were expected to succeed instead failed, and those who shouldn't have been able to do something somehow did. In the same way that the weakling character sometimes delivers the killing blow against a powerful foe, it shouldn't stretch credibility too much for someone who seems inappropriate to deliver the stirring speech, put the clues together, or solve the riddle.

"Bob saved the universe again."

Of course, if the GM rewards smart/eloquent/clever players, then he may create a situation where the smartest/most eloquent/most clever player overshadows everyone else. I'm not sure this is any greater a danger than someone creating a "combat monster", and one solution is almost the same: Create a situation where those skills aren't useful, or can't be used in game.

For example, if Bob the player is constantly overshadowing Pete's diplomat character in diplomatic acts, what if there were a situation where diplomacy is required in another language . . . a language Bob's character doesn't possess, but Pete's diplomat does? (Of course, you could also talk to Bob and reminding him to let Pete's character use his skills. Some players respond better to carrots; some to sticks.)

Likewise if our hypothetical Bilbo and Gandalf encounter a trap that requires knowledge of sacred geometry or other arcane knowledge is required, then Bilbo won't be very useful. (Remember: just because the GM allows players to use real world knowledge, this doesn't mean that he needs to *require* such things to be a solution.)

"How do you know that?"

Even in realistic modern day games, some gamers have problems with players bestowing their characters with knowledge they shouldn't necessarily have. "Wait!" They say, "How can your character know that you can build up an immunity to arsenic? He doesn't have that skill!"

Well . . . we all know lots of things. I've performed four semi-major repairs on automobiles, despite not knowing anything about cars at the time (or even how to drive). I know that a fairly popular theory of Old Testament scholarship holds that there are five distinct "authors" or sources for that work, despite not being a Bible scholar. I know the classic triad of childhood indicators of serial killers, despite not being an FBI profiler (or a serial killer, for that matter).

This is simulated in many games by a "default" system, where characters have a chance to know things based on their other skills or their innate intelligence. Depending on the circumstances, many groups may also be comfortable allowing players to bring their own "default" knowledge in. This can also be an incentive for players themselves; if a player spends a few hours at the library trying to figure out how to fight the mob, it can be interesting to have let his *character* contribute that knowledge as well.

Anyway, although there are certainly pitfalls to maintaining a thin curtain between player and character actions, the possibility exists of significant advantages. If your players are enthused and wanting to bring all their abilities to the table, then that can translate to a game where the *characters* are doing everything they can to triumph . . . which is often the definition of heroism.

And just envision the tales the players will tell about the time they all sat down, worked together . . .

. . . and *figured out the evidence*.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Dragon Mountain** adventure boxed set for **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons**. (Boy, was I disappointed when I bought it . . . although I must confess it's grown on me over the years)*

(Two stars) "Shelly: This cow can hand a bomb to another cow in the same field."

Mummies: The Next Generation

A Forgotten Futures Variant

By Marcus L. Rowland

"But surely that can't be anything but a dream. How could it be possible to bring all the vital functions to a dead stop like that, and yet keep them in such a state that it might be possible -- for that's what I suppose you are driving at -- to start them into activity again, just as one might wind up a clock that had been stopped for a few weeks and set it going?"
--The Romance of Golden Star

[*Forgotten Futures II -- The Log of the Astronef \(FF2\)*](#) takes as its source the series *Stories of Other Worlds* by George Griffith, originally published in 1900 and later novelized as *A Honeymoon in Space*. In these stories antigravity is developed in the late nineteenth century, and the first space flight is a tour of the solar system aboard the space-ship *Astronef*, circa 1900.

Griffith described a universe in which space ships used the Repulsive or R. Force, a "component of gravity," to travel between worlds at enormous speeds by pushing the ship away from planets or the sun. At one point in the stories the *Astronef* loses its lock on a distant planet, causing a dangerous navigational error. For simplicity some of the complications implied by this were ignored in the design of the *FF2* space travel rules, which allow continuous acceleration even in interstellar space. The time line for *FF2* ends in 1920, with the first flight to Proxima Centauri about to start and scheduled as a ten-year round trip, mostly at light speed.

If the stories are interpreted literally ships, must accelerate (and, just as important, decelerate) by pushing against the sun and planets, which implies that thrust may be inversely proportional to distance from the nearest astronomical body. Inside the solar system these complications rarely matter, and the existing game rules work well enough for most purposes. However, once past Neptune (Pluto either doesn't exist or is too small to matter) the mass of the solar system is soon left so far behind that it isn't possible to use it for any additional thrust. The maximum acceleration tolerable for extended periods is probably 1.5g to 2.0g, and there are diminishing returns for higher rates. Using basic equations it's possible to calculate the speed of the ship (as a fraction of light speed) for various accelerations from Earth orbit, and the time to travel to the nearest stars at these speeds:

	Acceleration (in g)							
	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0	1.25	1.5	1.75	2.0
Time to Neptune (in days)	22.0	15.6	12.8	11.1	9.8	9.0	8.4	7.8
Peak velocity (in c)	0.014	0.022	0.027	0.031	0.035	0.038	0.041	0.044
Time in years to Alpha Centauri (4.3 LY)	307	195	159	139	123	113	105	98
Time in years to Barnard's Star (6 LY)	428	272	222	194	172	158	147	137
Time in years to Wolf 359 (8.1 LY)	578	367	300	262	232	213	198	185

Obviously this isn't going to be a tourist trip; for example, at 1.5g acceleration out to Neptune it takes 113 years, mostly in free fall, to reach the nearest stars, with a window of only a few days at the end of the trip to slam on the brakes. Go far enough off course to miss the target system at the end of the trip and you can't stop; moreover, you probably can't make useful course corrections during the flight.

There are only two obvious ways to make this work; one is to build a huge generation ship, and trust that the

descendents of the first crew will remember what to do when it reaches its destination. The other is to develop some form of suspended animation, and use an automated ship with most or all of the crew asleep while it travels. One of Griffith's earlier novels describes a solution to this problem.

In *The Romance of Golden Star* two Incan mummies are brought back to life, having been in a deathlike trance for 365 years. The method used is medical, not magical: a long complex procedure invented by the Incas and rediscovered by Dr. Laurens Djama, an unscrupulous scientist who is later the villain of the story. The revival process isn't described in detail; all that we really know is that it takes a week and leaves Djama extraordinarily weary.

Having returned to life, the Inca Prince Vilcaroya uses his charisma and a vast buried fortune to locate and revive his sister Golden Star, throw all Spaniards out of Peru, and set up a new Inca state worshipping the Sun. The story ends with his triumph and marriage to "Joyful Star" (Djama's sister Ruth), and Golden Star's marriage to Francis Hartness, an English officer who has helped Vilcaroya in his struggle. The plot is straightforward and contains nothing to contradict *Stories of Other Worlds*, so it's quite possible to combine these histories and describe a world in which many nations have space travel, but the Peruvians are the pioneers of interstellar flight. A brief timeline for this world follows; many of the events described in *FF2* are omitted for brevity, but should still be assumed to occur if they they are not contradicted below.

Timeline

- 1532** To save them from the Spanish invaders, Prince Vilcaroya and his sister Golden Star are married, then subjected to an Incan ritual which creates a state of suspended animation and preserves them as mummies. They, and vast hoards of gold, are buried in cunningly disguised underground vaults. Although the conquistadors spend many years searching for the gold, the tombs are never found. Eventually their story is dismissed as a myth.
- 1892-1900:** Professor Hartley Redgrave formulates his "R. Force" hypothesis, the secret of space travel. He forms a partnership with Lord Redgrave, whose engineering company builds the first space ship, the *Astronef*, completing the work after Rennick's death.
- 1895-1897:** Vilcaroya is revived, and leads the search for Golden Star. Having been persuaded that incest is no longer acceptable, he (and his English friends) decide that their "death" has annulled the marriage. In Peru he discovers that the old Incan traditions still exist among the natives, suppressed by the government and church. When Golden Star is revived, she suffers partial amnesia and only remembers that she is Vilcaroya's sister. Aided by his native supporters and British mercenaries, and backed by the wealth of the Incas, he leads the overthrow of Peru's government to establish an Incan state. This goes largely unnoticed in the outside world, although there is strong opposition from neighboring states. Vilcaroya is crowned as Inca.
- 1898:** Peruvian government recognized by the United States, France, and Britain. Parts of Chile, Brazil, Ecuador, Columbia and Bolivia rebel to join the new nation. Peruvians buy armaments from Europe and the United States.
- 1899:** Peruvian government recognized by most European nations, but is fighting a sporadic war with its neighbors.
- 1900:** First flight of the *Astronef*. Lord Redgrave marries Zaidie Rennick. They set out for their honeymoon in space, returning several months later. Along the way they discover a dying race and pyramids on the Moon, flying natives who have never fallen from grace on Venus, hostile Martians, and scientifically advanced Ganymedans. They also visit Saturn and Ceres and witness the birth of a new star which they christen Lila Zaidie.
- 1901-1903:** Continued development of the R. Force and exploration of the moon. War between Chile and Peru ends in humiliating defeat of Chile. Brazil, Ecuador, and Columbia concede control of the areas contested with Peru. Bolivia concedes nothing but withdraws troops. Mexico recognize Peruvian

government.

- 1904:** Second expeditions to Mars, Jupiter. Ganymedan Embassy received in London. Following lengthy negotiations (and huge bribes) Bolivia recognizes Peruvian government and treaties establish new borders. Golden Star dies in childbirth.
- 1905:** First military spaceship, HMS Nova. Special Theory of Relativity. Second expedition to Ceres. Renewed fighting between Chile and Peru; Chilean navy defeated, war ended by winter snows on land.
- 1907:** Second expedition to Saturn. Civil war (largely fuelled by excessive taxation and opposition to the war with Peru) in Chile; Peruvian takeover is virtually unopposed.
- 1908:** Greater Peru generally recognized as a new nation. The state religion becomes sun worship, and various Inca temples are rebuilt on their original sites. Churches and cathedrals are razed. Peruvian government buys in technology to build R. Force engines and commissions construction of a 1200-ton general-purpose ship for passengers and freight, the largest ship built to date. Some unease about Peruvian territorial and extra-terrestrial ambitions in other South American states, Europe and the United States.
- 1909:** Peary reaches the North Pole of Venus. Calls for the Moon to be annexed into the British Empire. Expeditions to Mercury and Uranus. Ganymedan-designed flyers reach the market, making earlier "aeroplanes" obsolete. Aviation boom. Greater Peru purchases flyers for civilian and military use. Attempt to assassinate Vilcaroya fails; assassin is never caught. Last Christian priests and missionaries expelled from Peru.
- 1910:** Mercurian gold rush. Although its effects on Earth's economy are minor, several nations (including Greater Peru) diversify their currencies to a broader base in other precious metals and commodities. In a Papal missive Catholics working for Vilcaroya are warned that any actions which harm the Church may be grounds for excommunication.
- 1910-1916:** Global warming and flooding as rogue star Lila-Zaidie passes through the solar system. Greater Peru is relatively unaffected.
- 1911:** First expedition to Neptune (Amundsen). Second expedition to Neptune (Scott) ends in tragedy as the *Discovery's* engines lose their R. Force lock on Uranus and she goes badly off course. Once past Neptune she cannot be slowed; communications are cut as supplies run low in March 1912. Private detectives in the pay of the Catholic church, investigating Vilcaroya's claim to be the original Prince Vilcaroya reanimated, find Djama's research notes in London.
- 1913:** First flight of Peruvian spaceship *Manco* to the Moon, where one of the Lunar pyramids in the British territories is used for a sun ceremony. Complaints by British government are ignored by Peru.
- 1916:** Archduke Franz Ferdinand assassinated in Vienna. Great War sparked by land disputes following flooding; the United States is neutral. Climate beginning to stabilize as flooding reaches its peak. Peruvian engineers build a sun temple on the 200+°F hot side of Mercury; despite the temperature and dangerous insects, Vilcaroya spends several days there, and is said to have received some form of religious inspiration from the ordeal.
- 1917:** War ends in economic chaos as the United States floods the world with asteroidal gold. Most national economies severely depressed; United States, Greater Peru, and other nations with diversified currencies gain economic strength. Keynes suggests a new form of currency based on gravitationally negative R. Gold. Peruvian archaeologists working on Prince Vilcaroya's instructions rediscover the secret of suspended animation; animal experiments follow. The technique is not published, remaining a monopoly of Greater Peru, but rumors soon reach the outside world. The Vatican commissions similar experiments based on Djama's notes and fragmentary Inca documents found in the Vatican library.

- 1918:** 75-inch telescope installed at Mount Edward observatory on the far side of the moon finds planets orbiting Alpha Centauri A, Proxima Centauri, and Barnard's Star. Oxygen is detected in the atmosphere of two planets of Alpha Centauri. R. Gold becomes the main currency metal for international trade, giving countries with R. Force technology (including Peru) a huge economic advantage. Peru is now by far the wealthiest nation in South America.
- 1919:** Vilcaroya returns to his Mercurian pyramid for another period of meditation. Later in the year, the pyramid is looted by persons unknown, with several tons of gold and gems stolen. There are rumors (never confirmed) of Peruvian assassins pursuing the thieves.
- 1920:** Vilcaroya finally announces details of the revelations he has received on Mercury. The traditional Incan faith states that the world was created by the god Viracocha, who created Mankind and the Sun, Moon, and stars, but mainly worships the sun god Inti, the ancestor of the Inca rulers. In the new theology Viracocha is the creator of the universe, but had many children, each the God of a sun, and father of many mortal children. Most have forgotten their origins, and must be reminded of Viracocha. He has chosen the Inca because they did not forget, and wishes them to take word of Him to the stars, His forgetful children. Peru will build a fleet of holy ships to fulfil this destiny. The crews will sleep through their voyages, to be revived by automatic machinery at their destinations. They will take everything needed to colonize new worlds and construct temples. Eventually it is hoped that they will be able to build new ships and continue the holy mission. Within weeks a reporter who is unable to tell Incan and Egyptian mummies apart describes the revival machines as sarcophagi, a name that sticks.
- 1922:** After two years of refitting, the *Manco* sets out for Alpha Centauri with a crew of 20 and "cargo" of 200 men and women in hibernation, accelerating at 1g inside the solar system, to arrive late in 2061. When questioned about this "leisurely" pace, Vilcaroya comments that the Gods "aren't in a hurry." Experts speculate that sarcophagi are still somewhat experimental, and delicate enough to require a gentle ride. Once past Neptune the crew also go into hibernation. Three more ships are already under construction, their destinations announced as Proxima Centauri, Barnard's Star, and Wolf 359. Numerous scientists ask to be allowed aboard; all are refused passage. Only true Incans in perfect health will be allowed to meet the gods.
- 1924:** The Vatican secretly purchases two Redgrave-built armed freighters and has them fitted out for interstellar flight. The first sets out for Alpha Centauri at 1.25g; it will arrive there in 2047, fourteen years before the Peruvians. The exact purpose of the mission is never announced. The second is held in reserve, pending the departure of the next Peruvian expedition.
- 1926:** The second Peruvian starship, the *Golden Star*, sets off for Barnard's Star at 1.5g to arrive in 2084. Following a hasty refit the second Vatican ship is launched at 1.75g, to arrive in 2073. Russia, Germany, Great Britain, the United States, and Ganymede are also building starships . . .

Obviously this timeline is the prologue to a campaign which will mostly take place in distant solar systems, and may stretch over hundreds of years but still use continuing characters.

Colonization

Each faction has its own motives for colonization.

Peru

The Incas are primarily on a mystical pilgrimage; they want to visit new stars, construct their pyramids, and "remind the Gods of their Father." If there are intelligent natives around they may attempt to convert them to sun worship, but this isn't actually as important as the initial ritual (which is as symbolic, or as bloody, as the GM likes). They may also want to colonize some worlds; in the long term they will need to build new ships, which requires colonies with an

industrial base.

The Catholic Church

The Catholics wish to find new worlds, find out if their inhabitants have fallen from Grace, and if necessary convert them to Christianity. Their initial ships are launched to counter the Inca expeditions, and they will do everything possible to prevent them converting any alien races to sun worship. They will also establish colonies and missions as circumstances permit.

Russia, Germany, and Great Britain

These nations are seeking to expand their respective empires (in this world the Tsar and Kaiser still rule). Since the colonies can expect little or no help from the mother-world they will aim for self-sufficiency, and probably exploit native labor if available.

The United States

Interstellar trade probably isn't an option, so American expeditions will tend to emphasize the pioneering spirit of the old west; find and homestead new worlds, build up their industries, then begin the next wave of exploration as resources are developed. Unlike the other nations, they will probably aim for more distant solar systems, where they won't be troubled by rival expeditions; they may even try to accelerate through intermediate solar systems to achieve greater speeds on long journeys. This has dangers; it may be necessary to use high rates of deceleration to slow down sufficiently in the target solar system, with a risk of harming the crew or the engines.

Ganymede

The Ganymedans want to find more hospitable worlds than their frozen moon, but are albinos adapted to low gravity; they will look for small worlds orbiting relatively dim suns. Their ethics won't let them colonize inhabited worlds, although they may briefly visit them. Their technology should be considerably more advanced than any of the human pioneers, but they will typically appear to be aloof, rejecting prolonged contact with Terrans. Ganymedan starships are always crewed by the Dictos class, with most of the "cargo" passengers members of the Helos underclass. They rarely exceed 1g.

Meanwhile technology doesn't stand still in our solar system; eventually a way may be found to accelerate in interstellar space, reducing journey times to decades rather than centuries. For example, imagine an Inca sleeper ship arriving at its destination after three centuries, only to find that the People's Republic of Switzerland got there a hundred years earlier, after a flight that lasted twenty years. Will they build their pyramid as though nothing has happened, or seek some sort of revenge for their humiliation? Sooner or later the hostile Martians may also discover (or steal) the secret of space travel and enter the race for the stars.

Campaign Guidelines

- FTL travel is impossible. Interstellar communications are only possible by ship.
- Most solar systems have at least one habitable world, and most habitable worlds have intelligent humanoid natives.
- On approximately one world in ten the natives appear to be in a "state of grace"; they have apparently never learned to kill one another, and are innocent of cruelty, envy, and greed. However, appearances may be deceptive.
- There are no translating machines; telepathy exists but is limited to the vaguest forms of empathy.
- There should be evidence of at least one other star-travelling race, probably using similar but more advanced technology. Their exact nature and motives are unknown.
- Combat is virtually impossible in interstellar space; even if anyone wants to fight, it is almost impossible for one

ship to get close enough to another to use its weapons. If one ship tried to overtake another they would pass each other at distances of hundreds of millions of miles, with speeds differing by hundreds of kilometres a second and no way to match course or speed.

- Continuing characters are entirely possible, even in adventures set hundreds of years apart. For example, some of the Marines in the first scenario below could be Catholics, and end up aboard the *In Nomine* for the second adventure.

Scenario Ideas

The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God

Mercury, 1919: The adventurers are marines from *HMS Constellation*, ashore on Mercury for a few days while an engine problem is repaired. The mines of Mercury are mostly closed now, since natural gold is worth somewhat less than lead, but they've all heard of the fabulous antiques in Vilcaroya's Pyramid on the bright side of the planet. Vilcaroya took off for Earth a couple of weeks ago, so the pyramid is presumably closed. Sufficiently greedy men with time on their hands might conceivably think of a quick expedition to the pyramid, and an attempt to steal everything that isn't actually too heavy to move.

Naturally there are a few snags: the pyramid is half-way round the planet from the north pole landing field, and the only transports available are old ground trucks; their officers expect them to do some of the heavy lifting associated with the repair; and the only information they have on the pyramid's contents is a small newspaper photograph that doesn't actually reveal anything useful about the layout. When they reach the pyramid getting in, and getting out again, should involve dealing with some difficult booby traps (think of the start of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*) and one or two encounters with Mercury's deadly wildlife. But eventually they should reach the throne room and find that it really is everything they've imagined, littered with valuable antiques and exquisite modern artwork. Let them loot the place to their hearts content then escape, apparently unscathed and unsuspected. Then give them a few weeks to revel in their new wealth before the first blowpipe-wielding Peruvian hit-men turn up . . .

A Case of Conscience

Alpha Centauri, 2057: The adventurers are scientists and crewmen (or possibly even priests) aboard the Vatican's spaceship *In Nomine*, which has been in the Alpha Centauri system for the last ten years. Things haven't gone well; although the fourth world of the system is inhabited, the natives (with technology equivalent to Earth's middle ages) seem to have no interest in converting to Christianity or renouncing the evils of idolatry, and have even refused to learn Latin and other human languages. In four years the Incas ought to arrive, and their religion seems to be much closer to the ideas of the natives than Christianity. Some of the priests seem to be toying with the idea of forcible conversion, using the overwhelming firepower of the *In Nomine* to enforce compliance. Will the adventurers support this plan or look for a more peaceful answer, and are the natives as helpless as they appear?

Suspended Animation

Preparing for suspended animation is a relatively simple process; the patient must first live on a special low-residue diet for several days, then is injected with various exotic drugs and wrapped in bandages coated with a preservative chemical. Metabolism stops almost completely; the patient's body uses energy equivalent to a day's worth of food for each century that passes. The doctor in charge of the process should make a Doctor roll at Difficulty 7 less the BODY of the patient; any failure of 11 or less means that the patient ages a year for each century that passes, on a 12 the patient ages 1D6 years for each century that passes.

Patients in suspended animation require approximately one cubic yard of storage space, which should be built as normal hold space weighing 0.1 tons. While in suspended animation they must be kept cool and dry, in a breathable atmosphere. Air requirements are proportional to metabolic rate; the equivalent of a day per person per century. For example, a ship carrying 200 passengers for 150 years would need air purifiers and supplies for 300 man-days, 43

man-weeks.

Revival is traumatic. The doctor must be aware of the correct procedure, and overcome Difficulty 5 less half the BODY of the patient (round UP) to carry out the treatment successfully. It takes several days and leaves the patient weak (-1 BODY, Minimum BODY 1) for another week. Any failure of 11 or less means that the patient suffers partial amnesia lasting 2D6 months (if this roll is 12 the amnesia is permanent), on a roll of 12 the patient dies.

There's an obvious problem; a doctor is needed to administer these processes, but the doctor must also go into suspended animation. Fortunately there's an answer, although it is somewhat risky. Originally developed by Peru, and later by other nations, sarcophagi are complex mechanisms which hold one patient and can perform both procedures automatically, automatically injecting the drugs to preserve the patient or and applying massage, shock, and artificial respiration to bring the patient back to life. Unfortunately they lack the flexibility of a human doctor, and at their best only perform with the equivalent of Doctor [3] for this one purpose only. They can also go wrong; roll 2D6, +1 per century. On 10+ performance drops to the equivalent of Doctor [2]; on 13+ the machine degrades to Doctor [1]. Because of these problems ships must carry several machines, each holding a human doctor in suspended animation, with the hope that at least one will be fit to revive the rest of the crew. If a sarcophagus is operated by a human doctor it give a +1 bonus to Doctor skill for revival *only*, by taking over some of the routine resuscitation processes and leaving the doctor free to deal with emergencies and "fine tuning" of the procedure. Each sarcophagus occupies 3 cubic yards, weighs 1.5 tons, and costs £2200.

Ship Design and Operation

Most of the technology described in *The Log of the Astronef* can be used, with the following changes:

- **Control room:** Because of the precision navigation needed for interstellar flight all star ships must have a military style control room.
- **Engine life:** While engine cores have a finite storage capacity, and crystals normally have a limited life span, it is possible to "mothball" them to prevent deterioration. This requires partial dismantling of the engines. It takes at least six hours to take them apart, twenty-four to rebuild them and recalibrate, with a successful Mechanic roll at Difficulty 6 (plus or minus the maintenance modifier for the engine). A failed roll of 11 or less means that the time needed to mothball or recomission the engine is doubled, on a 12 the engine is damaged; if it is being mothballed the core slowly loses its R. Graviton charge and the crystal slowly deteriorates; both will be useless when it is rebuilt. If it is being rebuilt the crystal vibrates apart as soon as it is activated, damaging the precision-machined core.
- **Power:** Without working engines ships have no electricity, but a steady supply is needed to keep equipment (such as the air purifiers) operational. Fortunately it is possible to build a dedicated R. Force generator, producing a trickle of power indefinitely. This uses a special hourglass-shaped R. Lead core encased in magnetized steel. Gravitons oscillating between the two halves of the core make the casing vibrate inside a coil and generate electricity. As a rule of thumb, these generators need an ounce of R. Lead per ten tons of the ship devoted to life support, resuscitation equipment, and passengers, including hold space for passengers in suspended animation. The complete generator weighs 0.4 tons, occupies 0.5 cubic yards, and costs £250 excluding the core, which costs £1550 an ounce.
- **Supplies:** Although the passengers and crew of starships spend most of their time in hibernation, supplies are still required as noted above. The total requirement should be found by adding the requirement for passengers and crew in suspended animation to the requirements of the waking crew during acceleration, deceleration, and subsequent exploration; for example, a ship with a crew of 12 might spend two weeks accelerating, manouvering, and shutting down the engines and preparing for hibernation, two weeks resuscitating enough crewmen to handle deceleration, another two decelerating, then three months exploring the new system. The crew would need 216 man-weeks of supplies for their waking activities, plus supplies for the time spent in hibernation as discussed above.
- **Navigation:** All course corrections etc. must be made before the ship leaves the solar system. The basic difficulty is 3+1 per light year. On a failed navigation roll of 11 or less the ship is off course to such an extent that it will have to decelerate at unusual rates (e.g 2.5g) or fly across the target solar system before coming to a

halt in its outer fringes. On 12+ it is impossible to decelerate before leaving the target solar system. As usual these odds can be improved by the use of Navigation Engines, or by making repeated observations and course corrections before leaving the solar system, rather than counting on a single manoeuvre for success.

Characters

Professor Martin Lamson, Archaeologist

BODY [3], **MIND** [3], **SOUL** [3], Brawling [4], Linguist (Portuguese, Spanish, Quichua, Latin, Greek) [6], Marksman [4], Riding [5], Scholar (South America, its antiquities, and pre-Columbian civilisation) [6], Scientist (Archaeology) [7]

Quote: *"Surely, in the name of all that's sacred, you don't mean-!"*

Equipment: Tools (mostly carried by diggers etc.), .38 revolver, small shotgun, sketch pad and pencils, notebook, magnifying glass, etc.

Notes: Lamson is an experienced and dedicated archaeologist and expert on South American antiquities, who has collected many artifacts for the British Museum.

Game Use: Lamson's discoveries could be a springboard to almost any type of adventure in South America. He will carry on working in Peru after Vilcaroya takes over, and may be involved in the quest for the secret of suspended animation.

Dr. Laurens Djama, Physiologist

BODY [2], **MIND** [6], **SOUL** [2], Doctor [9], First Aid [7], Linguist (French, German, Russian, Hebrew) [7], Scholar (the occult, alchemy, spiritualism, mesmerism) [8], Scientist (Physiology, biochemistry) [10]

Quote: *"If these dead lips could speak, I believe they could make you and me millionaires in an hour."*

Equipment: Medical kit, laboratory supplies and equipment

Notes: Djama is a brilliant physician and physiologist who is sometimes regarded as venturing too close to the occult in his search for scientific knowledge. He revives Vilcaroya and Golden Star, but demands marriage to the latter as his price, later attempting to betray Vilcaroya to the Spanish authorities for a share of the Inca's gold. He is briefly imprisoned, but attempts to kill Vilcaroya and eventually commits suicide (apparently willing himself to death) before he can be executed.

Game use: Djama is too useful a villain to die so easily; an authentic mad scientist, it doesn't seem impossible that he has faked his death and is actually in a trance similar to the Peruvian mummification process, waiting to be revived by some confederate . . .

Ruth Djama, a beautiful nurse (AKA Joyful Star)

BODY [3], **MIND** [4], **SOUL** [5], Artist (cook) [6], Business [5], Doctor [5], First Aid [6], Linguist (Quichua, Spanish, French) [5], Riding [6]

Quote: *"Oh, no, no! that is too horrible! I don't want to hear any more. I will go back to England to-morrow."*

Equipment: Nurse's equipment

Notes: Ruth is Dr. Djama's sister, a talented nurse who is as capable as many doctors. She is beautiful, and (except that she is blonde) could be mistaken for Golden Star's twin; it is implied that there may be a mystical link between them. She eventually marries Vilcaroya, who calls her Joyful Star.

Game use: Ruth functions as Vilcaroya's conscience and guide to modern society, warning him when he is about to do something that most modern people would regard as reprehensible or taboo.

Prince Vilcaroya, a mummy

BODY [5], **MIND** [5], **SOUL** [4], Actor (disguise) [6], Brawling [6], Business (organisational skills) [6], Linguist (English, Spanish: native language Quichua) [6], Marksman (bow, blowpipe, throwing knife, spear) [7], Melee weapon

[6], Psychology (charisma) [8], Stealth [5]

Quote: *"Choose your companions well, and fear not but that your services and your faithfulness shall have their due reward."*

Equipment: peasant disguise, dagger, lantern, gold.

Notes: Vilcaroya is a man stranded in our age, puzzled, amazed and saddened by the changes since he was first mummified. He now seeks to restore the glories of Peru and throw off the Spanish yoke, and if necessary will be utterly ruthless to achieve these goals. Before he was mummified Vilcaroya married Golden Star, his sister, but the marriage was never consummated. In deference to modern sensibilities he has agreed to renounce the marriage; fortunately Golden Star doesn't remember it. He falls in love with Joyful Star, a woman with a startling resemblance to his sister, and eventually marries her.

Game use: The timeline above assumes that having achieved his goals Vilcaroya will consolidate his rule and resume the old customs of his ancestors. These may possibly include animal and human sacrifice, historically part of the Inca faith; while Ruth Djama would certainly object, she doesn't necessarily know everything that goes on in Peru. The "new theology" above gives him a motive to reach for the stars; to an extent it implies that he has become unhinged by his status as a living god, and it may be necessary to assume that Ruth has somehow dropped out of the picture, perhaps as the result of an untimely death.

Golden Star, Vilcaroya's sister

BODY [2], **MIND** [3], **SOUL** [6], Actor (singing, ritual dances) [7], Artist (costuming) [6], Linguist (English: native language Quichua) [4]

Quote: *"I have had strange, dim dreams, and thought I was not one, but two, and that one of myself was your sister and the other was your Coya and queen. It was strange, was it not, to dream like that?"*

Equipment: None

Notes: Golden Star was mummified with her brother; her memory was damaged by the process, and she has forgotten that she was briefly his wife. She looks like a brunette twin of Ruth Djama, and regards her as a beloved sister; Ruth reciprocates this feeling. She is a true innocent in the modern world, guided almost entirely by Vilcaroya, Ruth, and eventually her husband.

Game use: Sooner or later Golden Star may remember the truth about her marriage to Vilcaroya, but having married Hartness she is unlikely to want to resume this relationship; if anything she may regard it as a source of shame. She may be used as a pawn in plots against Vilcaroya.

Francis Hartness, a British army officer, later husband of Golden Star

BODY [6], **MIND** [4], **SOUL** [2], Brawling [8], Business (military organisation) [5], Linguist (German, Spanish, Quichua) [6], Mechanic [5], Military arms [7], Morse Code [5], Riding [6]

Quote: *"Now, senores, give up your swords and revolvers quietly and no harm shall come to you."*

Equipment: Sword, rifle, revolver, maps. Access to artillery and troops.

Notes: Hartness (whose rank is never specified) is a British officer, veteran of India and friend of Lamson, who agrees to serve under Vilcaroya to free Peru. Initially they are rivals for the hand of Ruth Djama, but Hartness transfers his affections to Golden Star when it is clear that Ruth has fallen in love with Vilcaroya. Although this may seem somewhat fickle, there is no doubt that his love for Golden Star is genuine. He recruits numerous mercenaries to help Vilcaroya's cause.

Game Use: Anyone planning a move against Vilcaroya or his treasure will probably have to get past Hartness and his mercenaries, as well as native troops and the general population (who regard Vilcaroya as a god). Doing so won't be easy. Hartness remains a British citizen; what will he do when war breaks out in 1916?

Special Note: Griffith states that Hartness was nick-named Viracocha after a "legendary hero"; in fact Viracocha was the father of the Inca gods and this name seems very unlikely.

Bibliography

The Forgotten Futures RPG, FF2, and *Stories of Other Worlds* are available on line via the [author's web site](#). A CD-

ROM containing the game material and more than 200 MB of period articles and illustrations is also available from the author. Printed and HTML versions of *The Romance of Golden Star* should be available in 2002.

You Like Me, You Really Like Me!

An Optional *GURPS* Rule for The Arts

by Steph Pennington

*"What do you mean you didn't like Chest Rockwell in **Hard Knock Life**? I thought he was great!"*

Sooner or later, someone wants to play an artist, whether an Italian Opera Singer for *Castle Falkenstein*, a bard for Yrth, or an actor/spy for *Espionage*. Sooner or later, that player is going to want to impress someone with their skill. But how to do it? The current rules call for the player to roll against their skill. Possible outcomes are Success, Failure, Critical Success, or Critical Failure. While simple, this system does not reflect that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. No matter how well the Opera Singer rolls, if she is singing for someone who absolutely hates opera, they may not take too kindly to her rendition of Brunhilde's "Flight of the Valkyries."

Luckily, *GURPS* has all of the mechanics necessary to deal with the Arts in a fashion more reflective of how different opinions of a performance/work of art can exist. By combining skill rolls and reaction rolls, the GM will be able to model the fickle nature of the adoring (or not so adoring) public.

The Process

1. The GM should assign modifiers that would affect the player's performance (e.g. bad paints and canvas, not enough rehearsal time, or a very well-written song).
2. The player rolls against his skill. The amount he succeeded or failed the roll by becomes permanently affixed to that performance/work of art as a modifier to the reaction roll of anyone who encounters the art.
3. When an audience member encounters the work of art/performance, the GM assigns modifiers that would affect the audience's reception of the work (e.g. the song flatters the audience, an audience member doesn't like the genre, the audience is very drunk, or the performer is Attractive).
4. The GM rolls as many reaction rolls are needed, modified by the Audience Reception modifiers from Step 3 and the artist's performance modifier from Step 2. The result is compared to the Reaction Chart on pg. B204-205 to determine how the audience feels about the performance.

This process can be used for both large groups, and specific members of the audience.

Example

Torgil the Bard (Performance-16/Handsome) and the rest of the party have been captured by authorities for breaking local customs, and brought before the local Lord. Torgil decides to try and impress the court with an epic poem of bravery in order to get them out of their deep trouble. The GM decides that Torgil should have a -1 stress penalty, because the lives of the party may rest on how well he performs. Torgil's player rolls a 10, succeeding by 5. Torgil knows that he gave a good performance, but was it good enough to impress the noble? The GM decides to make three reaction rolls, one for the court in general, one for the Lord, and one for the Lord's daughter.

For the court, the GM assigns a -2 penalty (because the court is suspicious of strangers) that is canceled out by Torgil's +2 for being Handsome. The GM rolls a reaction roll of 9, and adds 5 to it for Torgil's great skill. Checking on the NPC Reaction Table, the resulting 14 indicates that the court has a Good reaction.

For the Lord, the GM assigns a -2 penalty for being suspicious of foreigners that is canceled out by Torgil's +2 for being Handsome, -3 because the Lord has 3 levels of Strong Will and does not want to be swayed by the song, and another -3 because of the status difference between Torgil and the Lord. The GM rolls 10 for the lord and subtracts 1 (5 of Torgil's skill minus 6 for the Lord's strong will and negative status modifier). The resulting 9 indicates a Poor reaction. The Lord is not impressed.

Finally, for the Lord's Daughter, the GM assigns a +1 because the daughter has the mild form of Xenophilia, a +4 for Torgil's dashing good looks, and a +1 because the daughter has a thing for musicians that her father doesn't like. The GM rolls an 11, and add another 11 to the roll (the previous modifiers and Torgil's skill modifier) coming up with a whopping 22. It seems that the daughter has just fallen head over heels for our bard.

As the Lord orders our heroes to be put under house arrest, the court murmurs with shock and disapproval, and the Lord's daughter throws a saucy wink at Torgil.

Using this optional rule can add a lot more depth to a scene without adding too much time or complexity and allow for a wider range of artists and audience reactions. These rules will allow both the really good-looking, charismatic actor with very little talent, and the plain-looking but well-trained artist. It can reflect that audiences have different tastes, and throw a little drama into the performance roll. This article concludes with some ideas of what things could modify a performance or the audience's reception.

Performance Modifiers

Quality of Material (paints, scripts, songs), time spent practicing/constructing the work of art, complexity of the art attempted, the performer's stress level. In addition, the success or failure of rolls based on the following skills could also help or hinder the artist: Bardic Lore, Choreography, Directing, Fight Choreography, Make Up, Mimicry, Musical Composition, Psychology, Scene Design, Sex Appeal, and Stage Combat (among others).

Audience Reception Modifiers

Qualities of the artist (Status, Charisma, Physical Appearance, Odious Personal Habits, Voice, Reputation) can affect the audience's perception of the worth of the art as well as any number of other factors, such as preferred genre, mood, Strong/Weak Will, Intolerance, level of Drunkenness, Clueless, and Killjoy (among others).

Grenades!

A Rules Expansion for *Frag*

by Nicholas Anderson

Grenades are an integral part of any good shooting game, as they should be for *Frag*. Contained herein are some rules for grenades and grenade launchers for the Steve Jackson Game *Frag*. It introduces two new weapons, and various new rules for people to use to expand their version of *Frag*.

Grenade Launcher

New Weapon

A Grenade Launcher will launch a grenade across the board at your opponents, and can also be used to bounce grenades around corners for trick shots, or to avoid being in direct range of a player.

The weapon will have four pieces of ammo, with no special charging rules.

When firing the grenade normally, calculate according to *Frag* rules. When you hit the target the grenade explodes, causing damage to the person and to all adjacent people. Damage to the main square is 4 points and to all adjacent squares is 2 points (as shown below). If the target is next to a wall, the explosion will not spill over through the wall.

0	2	0
2	4	2
0	2	0

If you miss with the grenade, the grenade will bounce a number of times (1-3) before exploding. The amount of bounce in a grenade should be set at the beginning of the game. To figure out how the grenade bounces you can use two methods. The most accurate would be the 8-point method, but for the sake of those that wish to keep *Frag* strictly a d6 game both rules are included.

Six-Sider Option

Eight-Sider Option



T is the target square. With the Six-Sider Option, you do not use the rear 2 squares; the game presumes that, while throwing the grenade in that direction, there is a greater chance of the grenade to bounce in that direction. The Eight-Sider Option is full chaos, which adds to the fun of the game.

After you have determined the direction of the bounce, roll 1d divided by two (round up) to determine how far the grenade bounces. For each bounce, roll on the chart until the grenade comes to a stop. At each point the grenade hits, move the template so that the target is where the grenade bounces, and roll again. When the grenade comes to a stop it explodes using the same rules; hopefully you will hit your intended target. If the grenade comes in contact with any person, it will explode immediately.

Another option to use is set a limit of 20 squares for a grenade to travel, starting from your square. After those 20 square the grenade will explode.

If the grenade bounces up against a wall, whether it is done on purpose or via the bounce rules, you should take into mind standard physics. Let's say that the target was next to a wall on his left side. If the target was missed and the grenade bounced to the left to location 1 on the Eight-Sider Option, but the wall was along that part of the template, then the grenade would land one square up from location 2 on the template.

Bounce a grenade around a corner is another way to kill your target. When bouncing a grenade off of wall, you calculate the difficulty by counting to the wall and then counting to the target. A grenade will always bounce 90

degrees from the wall towards your target square, from the center of your square. Use the corner of the rulebook as the angle to check to see if you can hit your target. If, from your position, the target cannot draw a line using a 90 degree angle, then you cannot hit that target. If you miss the roll, then roll according to the scatter rules from the point on the wall to determine where it really lands.

Bouncing a grenade is a tricky subject and may not be for everyone. If any of the rules are confusing or you simply don't like them, you can always have the grenade just explode on impact.

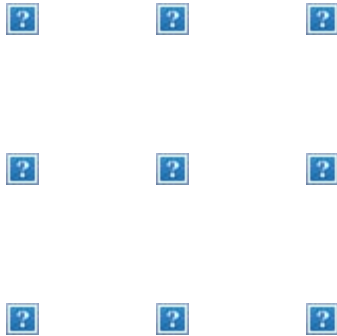
Thrown Grenades

New Weapon

Thrown grenades work almost the same way as grenade launchers except for figuring distance. When throwing a grenade, only use half of your accuracy rounded up to figure out how far you can throw it. In addition to the difficulty, you can have a thrown grenade be either primed or un-primed. A primed grenade will explode once it has finished bouncing on that turn, using the same rules as above. An un-primed grenade will explode at the end of the players next turn. All other rules are the same.

If you are using the distance traveled rule, then a thrown grenade can travel a distance of 10 spaces before exploding.

You can print out the table below to make your own grenade counters.



Pyramid Pick

Star Wars Epic Duels Game



Published by Milton Bradley

Design by Craig Van Ness and Rob Daviau

2 double-sided gameboards, 378 cards, 28 wound markers, 31 character pawns, 12 characters charts, and one die; \$19.95

"Did you ever wonder . . .

"What would happen if the Force was no longer divided? Jedi Knights could battle each other . . . Sith Lords could challenge one of their own . . .

"What if classic battles could be recreated and have completely different endings? Imagine the unthinkable. Anakin Skywalker versus Darth Vader. Impossible? Not anymore!

In *Epic Duels*, you create hundreds of never-before-seen battles or relive classic duels."

Epic Duels was a surprise for me: A fun, entertaining game with more similarities to hobby game releases than a mass-market boardgame. Shortly after the game's release, I started receiving scattered e-mails informing me that the game was like *Frag*. So I promptly tracked down a copy to see for myself what people were talking about. I didn't feel it was possible that Hasbro would have lifted the mechanics of a game from such a smaller publisher.

I was right.

While there are similarities between *Epic Duels* and *Frag*, those similarities have nothing to do with one "lifting" mechanics from the other or even inspiration between them. Both use squares for movement, both use cards, and both play fast. End of similarities.

The premise behind *Star Wars Epic Duels* is that each player takes a major character -- twelve are provided -- and the corresponding minor characters (each major character has one or two minor characters). These groups then battle it out between each other on a simple gameboard. The available major characters (and their minor characters) are:

- Anakin Skywalker (with Padme Amidala)
- Boba Fett (with Greedo)
- Count Dooku (with two super battle droids)
- Darth Maul (with two battle droids)
- Darth Vader (with two stormtroopers)
- Emperor Palpatine (with two Royal Guards)
- Han Solo (with Chewbacca)
- Jango Fett (with Zam Wessell)
- Luke Skywalker (with Princess Leia)
- Mace Windu (with two clone troopers)

For Those Who Worry About Such Things

The character pawns are painted plastic figures, each a little over an inch tall. Some of the paint jobs are excellent (Boba Fett) while others aren't really painted but are instead just molded in the appropriate color of plastic (stormtroopers and clone troopers are molded in white plastic). This isn't a problem at all, but if you're someone who demands better quality paint jobs on game figures you can easily paint these yourself. For most of us, the commercial paint jobs are good enough to start playing the game.

- Obi-Wan Kenobi (with two clone troopers)
- Yoda (with two clone troopers)

(This review covers two-player games, though there are variants that allow for up to six players in a game.)

Next, each player takes the appropriate card deck (there are twelve in the game, one for each major character) and the character pawns for their major and minor characters. You must also select a gameboard at this time. Your choices are: Carbon-Freezing Chamber, Emperor's Throne Room, Geonosis Arena, and Kamino Platform. Each gameboard is about 9" x 13" (7 x 10 squares) and printed with a picture of the appropriate environment. The squares are not printed over some elements of the map, making off-limits terrain, but it's nothing overly complicated and doesn't affect gameplay much at all. For example, The Kamino Platform board loses 20 of the 70 squares to "terrain;" thus there are only 50 squares on the board in which to move. The twenty missing squares are divided between two water areas and Jango Fett's Slave 1.

With all of that accomplished you're now ready to begin playing the game.

Playing the Game

Each player draws four cards from his deck and then rolls a die. The higher-rolling player places his major character on the appropriate square (names are printed on the map showing where characters start). Minor characters are placed in any adjacent square. Other players place their characters clockwise. Now the high roller takes his turn.

On a turn you begin by rolling the die and moving one or all of your characters the printed number of spaces; half the time you will be able to move one character up to 3-5 spaces, and the other half you can move *all* characters up to 2-4 spaces. You may only move forward, backward, or side-to-side -- no diagonal movement!

After movement you may perform up to two actions. There are three different actions in Epic Duels. These are:

- *Drawing a Card:* You may choose to draw one card. Your hand size limit is 10.
- *Playing a Card:* You can play one card for an action. The three types of cards are Combat, Power Combat, and Specials. See box for descriptions of the three types of cards.
- *Healing a Character:* This is difficult to accomplish and can only be attempted when all of the major character's minor characters have been destroyed. Even then it isn't easy.

After you have completed your two actions play proceeds to the next player.

Combat

Your goal is to destroy other characters; you do that by attacking them. Attacking is fairly easy, requiring you to move into an attack position and then play a card on your target.

Moving Into Position: You can only attack if you are in an adjacent space. If the character has a picture of a blaster on their character chart, he may also perform ranged attacks with the appropriate card. To do

The Cards

Three different types of cards are the heart of the game system.

- **Combat Cards:** These have an attack and defense value and are used to (duh!) attack and defend. The cards only work for the character who is pictured on the card. Thus when playing Boba Fett you may only use Boba Fett pictured cards to attack with that figure. Greedo cannot use Boba Fett cards to attack.

Power Combat Cards: These are played much like Combat cards but are slightly more powerful (and interesting). Power Combat cards sometimes do not have defense numbers in addition to attack numbers but they do have a special ability. Some examples are:

- *Jango Fett -- Missile Launch:* Has a 7 Attack, and when played the play draws 3 cards from his deck (4 if the game is taking place on the Kamino Platform board).
- *Darth Vader -- All Too*

so, however, they must be in a straight line from the target or on the exact diagonal.

Attacking and Defending: The attacker plays a Combat or Power Combat card face down. The defender may play a Combat card with a defense value face up.

Damage: If the defense number is higher than the attack number no damage is done. If the attack is higher, a number of points equal to the difference is done to the target. A wound marker is slid up the targeted character's chart.

Destroying: When the wound marker hits the red circle, the character is dead. Darth Vader is the most powerful character in the game, capable of taking 20 points of damage; battle droids are the weakest and can only take 3 points of damage. Average damage of a Combat card appears to be around 4 or 5 and few attacks are ever completely blocked.

It took Boba Fett 3 turns to defeat Anakin Skywalker in our first game (which was very close since Fett was almost dead . . . the next turn Anakin would have easily defeated him).

Winning the Game

You are out of the game when your major character is defeated. Against many opponents it's wise to ignore the minor characters and concentrate all of your attacks on the major character . . . especially when fighting Darth Vader.

An average two-player game seems to take 15 to 20 minutes. Not having played any larger games I can't really give a time length for them but, based on two-player play and experience with other games, I suspect a six-player game could be completed in about an hour.

Star Wars Epic Duels is a fun, fast game that should keep the average game group entertained for hours at a time. It's also the perfect introductory product to give to the non-gamer in your life. The simplicity of the rules is deceptive, as is the "Ages 8 and up" printed on the box. This game could easily be expanded with scenarios and, hopefully, will do well enough that Hasbro will print some official expansions for the game.

(For those looking for some scenarios that show the potential of this game, point your browser towards <http://www.philipreed.com/epicduels.html> .

--Philip Reed

Easy: Has a 3 Attack . . . but if the card isn't blocked the target suffers 20 damage! This just might be the most dangerous card in the game.

- *Yoda -- Serenity:* This is a 15 Defend card; when played, it allows the Yoda player to draw a new card.

As you can see, Power Combat cards can add a lot to a game session. There aren't many of these in each deck but as far as I can tell none of them are worthless.

- **Special Cards:** There is a wide variety of what these cards can do, and some of them do not count as an action. There are even fewer of these than Power Combat cards but they are the super-powerful cards in the game and can quickly change any combat. Some example Special cards are:
 - *Mace Windu -- Wisdom:* This let's you move Mace Windu up to 5 spaces and draw a card.
 - *Emperor Palpatine -- Meditation:* Heals 4 damage on the Emperor, and he gets to select an opponent who cannot draw cards on their next turn.
 - *Count Dooku -- Force Push:* Playing this card moves any character in a space adjacent to Count Dooku to any empty space on the board, and causes 1 damage to that character.

Pyramid Review

Ascension of the Magdalene (for Unknown Armies & d20)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Rick Neal

Illustrated by C. Brent Ferguson, Chris Schott and David White

64 pages; \$13.95

Ascension of the Magdalene is the second title to appear under the Coriolis imprint from Atlas Games. Each Coriolis book provides a single adventure, but with dual stats for two different RPGs. One is Wizards of the Coast's **d20 System**, but the other is what provides the adventure with a setting, background and flavor. In the first Coriolis title, *Burning Shaolin* by Robin D. Laws, this other RPG was Atlas Games' *Feng Shui*. This took the characters back to the game's 69 A.D. Juncture for a round or three of butt-kicking Hong Kong *wuxia* style, with a side trip into the Netherworld along the way. The RPG that provides *Ascension of the Magdalene* with all of the essential ingredients is *Unknown Armies*, the game of modern occult intrigue, also from Atlas Games.

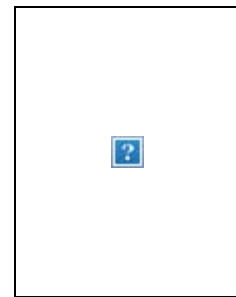
The first thing to note about *Ascension of the Magdalene* is that it slips into neither RPG with any ease. This is because it is set in the city of Prague in the year 1610 -- too late for an atypical quasi-medieval **d20** game and far too early for a late twentieth, early twenty-first century *Unknown Armies* campaign. The author makes some suggestions to get around this inherent problem. One is to use the adventure to kick-start a renaissance-era set campaign using either **d20** or *Unknown Armies* and several suggested plots are given so that a GM can continue the game beyond the adventure itself. Another is to adapt the adventure to the DM's own **d20** campaign; several alternative names are given to replace their real world equivalents found in *Ascension of the Magdalene*. For a modern day *Unknown Armies* campaign, it is suggested that it could be used as a flashback, or that someone such as St. Germaine kick the group back four centuries or so to sort out a particular problem. This could be dealing with Edward Kelley (the partner of one Doctor John Dee), or even because St. Germaine was in Prague in 1610 and happened to see the characters there! Alternatively, and suggested with tongue slightly ensconced in cheek, the whole adventure could be run and the players be told that, "It was all a dream" . . .

Ascension of the Magdalene is not a conversion guide for turning *Unknown Armies* characters into **d20 System** ones, or vice versa. All statistics are given for both systems, and are clearly differentiated. Statistics and material relevant to *Unknown Armies* are printed in a darker text and marked with a dark clock face, whereas that particular to the **d20 System** is given in a light grey text and marked with a white clock face. This division is somewhat problematic, as the eye is constantly drawn to the darker text for *Unknown Armies*, relegating the **d20 System** text to a secondary, lesser status.

The other problem is the lack of physical descriptions given for the NPCs in the adventure; this is further hampered by a lack of illustrations. In fact, much of the art in *Ascension of the Magdalene* is far from relevant to the contents of the book. One pleasing aspect of the layout are the adventure's maps. All of the game-related material is placed in boxes with a wooden screen-like background, but the maps are actually cut into the wood, to give almost a parquetry-like effect. Although a little dark to read, this does give *Ascension of the Magdalene* a pleasing look.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The setting for the adventure is Prague, 1610, during the closing years of the reign of the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf II. Under his patronage, the city has become Europe's artistic, scientific, and intellectual center, attracting such individuals as Doctor John Dee and Edward Kelley. Religious rivalries are rife though, as the state faith Catholicism



feels threatened by the rise of Protestantism; both dislike the favoritism bestowed upon Prague's Jewish community by the Emperor.

The city has also of late become the center for occult and conspiratorial intrigue. During the summer of 1610, the renowned painter and tolerated heretic, Caravaggio, disappeared. The church closed his workshop, but not before many of his paintings went missing. One of these was entitled "Ascension of the Magdalene," and it is rumored that Rudolf II has come into possession of this painting. He has added it to his "Wunderkammer," a hidden museum of oddities and rare items, which is located under his ruling seat, Hradcanny Castle.

Of course, the Emperor has a publicly acknowledged Wunderkammer, but it is into his personal, hidden museum that he has secreted the painting, and it is from this that the players must steal it. Numerous parties will want the painting: the rebellious rogue and charlatan, Edward Kelley, so that he can return it to Rudolf and thus to imperial favor; Rabbi Loew, Prague's most prominent Jew, so that he may do the same and retain Rudolf's friendship; the Order of St. Cecil, a secret Catholic order devoted to the investigation of any magical evil; the Order of Hero of Alexandria, engineers and mechanomancers who want the painting to power their alterations to the City Clock, to prevent it from stopping and thus ending the world; and finally, the Rosicrucians, who desire the painting for what they believe it represents -- the perfect example of artistic alchemy.

From among these factions, the characters should be able to find a patron . . . though in doing so, this will make enemies of those factions they decide not to work for. Then there is the matter of getting into the *Wunderkammer* -- the *only* known entrance is via the city's sewers and it only opens just once each day at midnight, and only for a few minutes. Getting through the sewers with opposition upon their tail is not made any easier in the knowledge that it will be waiting for them when they come back out.

The contents of the Imperial Wunderkammer turn out to be most strange indeed -- befittingly so, as this is an *Unknown Armies* scenario. The painting "The Ascension of the Magdalene" is in fact a magical artefact and is the final work of Caravaggio, after which he ascended in a burst of light to the Invisible Clergy. It has some strange effects upon the contents of the Wunderkammer, which includes a variety of clockwork constructions, arcane artefacts, and other guardians.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Ascension of the Magdalene is designed for a *d20 System* party of four to six characters of sixth to ninth level or for a *Unknown Armies* group of moderate experience, with at least one adept or avatar among them. An *Unknown Armies* GM wanting more information of the Invisible Clergy might want to refer to their sourcebook, *Stratosphere*, although there is enough information given in *Ascension of the Magdalene* to do without it. Referees for either game should check out issue #285 of *Dragon Magazine* for Ken Hite's "Cities of the Ages" column, which detailed the city of Prague.

Beyond the adventure itself, *Ascension of the Magdalene* provides plenty of material for the Open Gaming License. There are a variety of clockwork constructs, wheellock firearms and the proofed armor to withstand pistol rounds, the avatar concept, and mechomancy -- the steampunk magic that enables the building and animation of mechanical constructs. Such constructs can even be given intelligence, though this is at great cost to the mechomancer, as it will cost him personal memories to power his device. Both the avatar concept and mechomancy are the only system specific material ported into the *d20 System* from *Unknown Armies*. On the other hand, there is little new for the modern day *Unknown Armies* game, amounting to a pair of new avatars -- the Rake and the Magus.

The problem with *Ascension of the Magdalene* is that the emphasis is not quite right between the dual game systems. This was not so much of a problem in the first Coriolis title, *Burning Shaolin*, as the underlying raison d'être between its two games is thwacking things. For the *Unknown Armies* GM, *Ascension of the Magdalene* represents an interesting change of pace, as the adventure is more akin to a *d20* scenario -- more combat orientated and driven by a location rather than by plot. For the *d20* referee, this will be a more difficult adventure to make use of, as both technology and timeframe are likely to be at odds with their own campaign. Perhaps *Ascension of the Magdalene* could be used in a setting more in tune with the renaissance period -- the *Iron Kingdoms* from Privateer Press, Hogshead Publishing's *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* and *Sorcerer's Crusade* from White Wolf all spring to mind as

possible suggestions.

In presenting material for two different games, Atlas Games make *Ascension of the Magdalene* an expensive purchase for referees of either system. This is probably more so for the *Unknown Armies* GM, as they gain little more than the adventure itself, even though it is an interesting one. Meanwhile the *d20* referee gains both adventure and new material, but will find it slightly difficult to use fully because the layout favors *Unknown Armies*.

--*Matthew Pook*

Curtain, Curtain . . . Who's Got the Curtain?

It's time for part three of my two-part series on the line between player and character experiences. While [week one](#) dealt with looking at a thick wall, and [week two](#) dealt with a thin (or nonexistent) wall, this week deals with a "misc" wall. This isn't an essay, per se, but more like a collection of bits that I couldn't squeeze into any of the other two pieces. Think of it as an essay loaf, chunked and formed from real essay parts.

* * *

FASA's *Doctor Who RPG* didn't *have* an Intelligence attribute; the closest they had was Mentality (MNT), which was "how well a character can store and process information . . ." It goes on to say that, "Mentality . . . is *not* a measure of intelligence, which really depends on the ability of the player himself. The player may decide that his character will be smart or dumb, whichever the player likes."

Of course, this isn't really true; unless you have a special arrangement with your GM (perhaps involving cash), you aren't going to be able to act like you're Albert Einstein if you normally get confused by shampoo. (" . . . I'm rinsing. I'm repeating. I'm washing. I'm rinsing. I'm repeating. When will it *end?!?*") But it's a surprisingly candid admission of the thin wall that game wanted to establish between player and character intelligence.

* * *

White Wolf has long encouraged a thin wall between player and character experiences with their games. In *Mage*, for example, there are no set abilities, and effects are determined entirely by the player (limited to an upper maximum by their power levels). The upshot of this is that a more creative player will often be much more effective than a more powerful *character*. (This is true in a lot of games, but more so, in my opinion, in *Mage*; my relatively weak character with substantial Mind abilities was often more effective than Magicians Who Make Stuff Blow Up.) Likewise, the difficulty of using powers in *Changeling* is determined by how creative and elaborate the player is in coming up with "bunks"; thus a character who wants to create a magical passage by drawing a simple doorway in chalk will have less of a chance for success than a character who sings the entirety of "Break on Through" by The Doors in Pig Latin.

Their latest game, *Exalted*, takes this concept one step further by giving bonuses to players who can come up with creative ways to describe their combat actions. Thus a player who says, "I use my bo-staff as a pole to vault me upwards, giving me a chance to propel myself off the ceiling and kick together the two heads of the guards in front of the cell" will have a higher chance of success than, "I kick the two guards." (*Exalted* is not the most realistic game in the world.)

The idea behind this is to create a more cinematic game; by encouraging players to describe their combat actions, combats will (in theory) be more flavorful and exciting. Of course, this has the immediate effect that more creative and descriptive players will have the High Tech Edge in combat. Those who like thick player/character walls will probably find this slightly less onerous than having their molars worked on by a first-day dental student with a nervous twitch. Fortunately, it's a relatively small rule, and by no means essential to the game; those who want to get rid of it could do so easily.

* * *

In the classic interactive fiction (read: "text adventure") game *Zork II*, there was a "maze" whose passages couldn't be mapped in any traditional way. Instead, it required the player to recognize that there was a wooden club in the initial room, then from that deduce that he needs to go northeast, then northwest, then southwest, then southeast. Having done this, the door to the north opens.

Why? Because it was a *baseball diamond*, and the puzzle was solved once the player ran the bases.

This puzzle is, perhaps, one of the most reviled in all of Interactive Fictiondom. First it requires knowledge outside of

the world (since the *Zork* universe seems to be some weird fantasy/exploratory hybrid . . . one that had never mentioned "baseball" previously). Second, not only does it require knowledge of the real world, it requires knowledge of the real *American* world. In the same way your average American would be mystified by any puzzle requiring knowledge of cricket, Europeans -- who also bought and liked the *Zork* series -- were generally boggled by this conundrum. Within a decade plans were firmly afoot for the European Union. Coincidence?

Anyway, this puzzle is definitely a horrid example of *something*, although I confess not to being certain what. I suspect it's an unreasonable example of the "GM" requiring knowledge not contained within the [internally consistent world](#), without providing any kind of escape clause. (Or maybe it's just an example of a stupid puzzle . . .)

* * *

Probably the best advice I have for maintaining a thick curtain between player and character abilities in many circumstances is to have players describe their plans, then base the outcome on the character's abilities. In other words, the more (say) intelligent a character is, the better the player's plans will work.

Thus a player who comes up with a brilliant, elaborate plan for his rock-stupid barbarian, will have a pretty good chance of that plan failing, while the player of Dr. Bigbrain who says, "Let's tape bottle rockets to our backs and fly to the top of the building!" will see his plan succeed more often than not. Likewise a player who gives a long flowery speech but whose *character* is socially inept will find himself faced with an indifferent audience, while the brilliant speaker character will succeed in wooing the lady fair, even though the *player* is only saying, "Sweet Lady Hargrove . . . I would walk five hundred miles -- and I would walk five hundred more -- just to be the man who walked a thousand miles to fall down at your door. Oh, and everybody Wang Chung tonight."

(Over on the [message boards](#), Douglas Cole mentions using a similar technique . . . with [an amusing anecdote](#).)

Another good way to have players actually roleplay while maintaining a somewhat thicker curtain is to have the GM present (or eliminate) possibilities based on skill rolls. Thus the player of a master thief character trying to break into a building may make a skill roll. A failure may generate no ideas (it's up to the player to come up with something, or the character may not be able to break in at all). A minimal success may give the player a GM-created list of ideas (some good, some bad), and it's up to the player to choose one . . . or try accumulating better successes to narrow down the possibilities. A better success roll will let the GM cross off some of the bad ideas, while a critical success may let the GM circle what is (in his mind) the *best* idea. That way the player still has the satisfaction of knowing he is in control, while knowing that his skills create a much more favorable situation than someone with lesser skills.

* * *

And so, in conclusion . . .

(Waitaminute! How can an essayloaf even *have* a conclusion?!?)

. . . like so many aspects of gaming, the notion of the thick or thin curtain is almost certainly a continuum. It's probably impossible to get an entirely nonexistent curtain, unless you happen to be playing yourselves sitting around a table playing a roleplaying game sitting around a table playing a roleplaying game sitting around . . . Likewise an absolute curtain is probably equally impossible; unless we are actually able to *create* another personality (which would probably present its own problems . . . especially on the interstate), aspects of "real world" knowledge and interaction may well bleed over every so often.

The opacity of that curtain will probably also depend on the campaign and the game; a *How to Host a Murder* series doesn't have rules for "character knowledge" or task resolution, so *everything* that will be accomplished will be via the player's observations and abilities. On the other hand, a particularly "detached" game world (like, say, playing an entire alien race in battle with other alien races, each trying to pass themselves off as gods to an ancient people) would require a lot more reliance on in-game skills and abilities. Even within the same *game* people can have thicker or thinner curtains. One player may be more comfortable with giving his speeches directly and relying on his abilities to sway the GM; another may be playing a character with persuasion skills far beyond his own, and prefer to say what

goals he hopes to accomplish, rather than exactly what he's saying.

Tinker; try new things; discuss with everyone how things will work. No matter what you decide, it's curtains for you.

[The LAME JOKE POLICE escort Steven away in shackles.]

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Unexploded Cow*** (This was one of the most-answered trivia questions I've yet presented, which surprises me . . .)

(Three stars) "Malk Content is a trickster of unknown origin. He has woven a hundred tales of his origin and has claimed to be a Native American shaman, a Mongol warrior, a Babylonian King, the son of Aeneas, a Persian prince, an alien, a ruler of the Seelie Court of the Faeries, the son of God . . ."

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



The Son of Cheeroonear

Part II

An Adventure for *GURPS*

by Jeremy Davies

Part I, [last week](#), gave the plot of the adventure. This week details the special items found in the cave, plus NPC and creature stats.

NPCs

Albert Patrick Randolph

5'6", 150 lbs., sandy brown hair, pale sunburnt complexion, nervous gray eyes, haunted appearance.

ST 10, **DX** 11, **IQ** 12, **HT** 9

Speed 5 Move 5 Dodge 5

Advantages: Literacy, Appearance (Handsome), Danger Sense.

Disadvantages: Greed, Paranoia, Weak Will -2. Fanaticism (striking it rich with gold).

Quirks: Distrusts natives

Skills: Area Knowledge (Western Australia's' south east)-14, Riding (horse)-12, BP Weapons-13, Broadsword-11, First Aid/TL-13, Navigation/TL-14, Naturalist-14, Prospecting-15, Administration-14, Law-11, Leadership (default)-5, Diplomacy-12, Strategy-11.

Equipment: compass and sextant, diary

Albert was the fourth son of a well-to-do English gentleman. As such, he joined the army at the age of 17 with his father purchasing a commission for him. He was found to be far too nervous a man to lead troops, as well as being a born non-leader, so was soon shuffled out to India in a staff position in the field of Ordinance, where he was given an education in surveying.

After running up numerous gambling debts, Albert sold his commission and fled to Sydney Town, New South Wales. He eventually managed to secure a position as a surveyor's assistant in the far-flung colony of Western Australia, the only colony that still accepted convicts for labor. In his travels, he came across an aboriginal man who seemed to have a lump of gold attached to one of his "Indian artifacts." Although he was unable to get "any sense out of the chap," it started an obsession that soon replaced his gambling need.

Everywhere he went from that moment on, he would test for the likelihood of gold ore. He had only found a few small streaks until the "big one" he called Albert's Luck . . .

"Two Bob Snooze" Walter Trimble (Gnaragka Kamilaroi)

6'1", 155lbs, long black hair kept combed and tied back, dark brown eyes, dark brown skin, scar below left eye.

ST 12, DX 15, IQ 11, HT 13

Speed 7 Move 7 Dodge 8

Advantages: Literacy, Combat Reflexes, Appearance (Handsome), Alertness +2, Strong Will +2, Toughness DR1, Hard To Kill/1

Disadvantages: Flashbacks (abusive childhood -10), Jealousy, Bloodlust, Enemy (Colonial Government of New South Wales-wanted Dead or Alive) appears on 9 or less.

Quirks: dislikes native lifestyle, patterns himself after American dime novel gunslingers, enjoys writing verses about his own exploits

Skills: Riding (horse)-16, Poetry (western culture)-12, Running-16, Throwing-16, Swimming-14, Brawling-16, Fast Draw (Pistol)-19, Guns (Pistol)/TL5-19, Guns (Rifle)/TL5-19, Knife-15, First Aid/TL5-11, Naturalist-13, Tracking-13, Climbing-15, Navigation/TL5-12, Theology(Christian)-10, Area Knowledge (Eastern Australia)-13, (South/West Australia)-11, Carousing-14, Gambling-14, Savoir-Faire-12, Shadowing-14, Stealth-14.

Equipment: Two English Deane-Harding .45 double action five shot percussion revolvers. 1860 Spencer .50 repeating rifle

Gnaragka was born in the colony of New South Wales to a tribe of the Kamilaroi in 1838. He lived among his people for one day of his life, before his family was killed in a reprisal attack to avenge the spearing of some settlers north of Port Macquarie. He was left to die beside the body of his mother.

Two days later, he was discovered by Henry Trimble, a nearby settler. He was brought home to his wife, who had a three month old baby still at the breast. The Trimbles unofficially adopted him and named him Walter.

At the age of 6, the meager Trimble farmhouse was set alight; Walter was the only survivor of the blaze. A group of "blacks" were blamed for the attack, and Walter was sent to live with his Uncle at Port Macquarie. The Uncle was a terrible man who subjected all the children in his care to vicious and despicable abuse. Walter is afflicted with debilitating flashbacks of this traumatic period of his life.

Walter became a New South Wales native policeman in 1856. He was well-liked by his commanders, being a "killer of aborigine without tire or remorse." His command of the English language soon saw him as a respected sergeant. Respected for a "savage" that is . . .

In 1859, Walter shot three white men dead at the Red Inn in Newcastle. He had overheard them discussing a certain burning of a farmstead 15 years earlier that they had been a part of. Walter turned to bushranging, often killing his victims at the slightest aggravation. A newspaperman dubbed him Two Bob Snooze, ostensibly due to the presumption that he would "put his own grandmother to sleep for two bob." The name began to appear on the wanted posters, which appealed to Walter's vanity. It made him sound like an American gunman.

In 1860, the east coast became too hot for Two Bob. After a very near-miss in Golbourn, he headed west on a fishing boat. He spent some time in South Australia, but soon wound up in Fremantle.

Bishop t'bakka/Guayyanya Ngadjunma

5'7", 114 lbs., short gray mangy hair, regularly scrubbed with mud and wet sand, dark brown skin, wrinkled with age and covered in ritual scars, thoughtful brown eyes, gray beard of various lengths.

ST 9, DX 12, IQ 14, HT 11

Speed 5.75 Move 5 Dodge 5

Advantages: Native Land Affinity (+5 to all dice rolls in Ngadjunma tribal area)

Disadvantages: Addiction (pipe tobacco)

Quirks: laughs a lot while speaking

Skills: Area Knowledge (Western Australia's' south east)-14, Navigation/TL-14, Naturalist-14, Stealth-14, English-7
Equipment: tribal law stones, bone pieces, spear

Guayyanya was born over sixty years ago to the Ngadjunma tribe on a yearly corroboree day of some significance. On the night of his birth, two magpies landed beside his mother and cawed together in the night. This was seen as very significant; Guayyanya was destined for some form of greatness.

He became a clever man quite young due to the help of the spiritual presence of the legendary Winjarning brothers. It was thought he was going to be the one who would slay the terrible beast, Cheeroonear ha, that had begun to plague the Nullabor tribes. It was not to be.

Guayyanya was chosen to greet the champions that would kill the beast, so he left his wives, children, and tribe, and lived a solitary life at Three Rock Spur, which became the seal town of Esperance in the 1840s. He thought that these white men, with no Dreaming to speak of, were the ones, but he could convince none of them to accompany him inland. Despair loomed upon him. The spirits of the Brothers would no longer come to him. But still he waited. He trusted in the spirits.

Over the years of isolation, Bishop t'bakka, as the whalers came to call him, has become a little strange. He is barely in touch with reality anymore. He learned some English from the whalers, but he has trouble using it, since he is so out of practice. He has been looking forward to the day when the champions would arrive and he can return to his people to finish his time here, to become his Dreaming. His excitement will be obvious even to a fool.

"The Test" Adversaries

Arnold "Red Belly" Thompson
unofficial leader

6'2", 220 lbs., balding wispy dark hair, ruddy complexion, light blue eyes.

ST 14, DX 12, IQ 10, HT 12
Speed 6 Move 6 Dodge 6

Advantages: Literacy, Appearance (unattractive), High Pain Threshold.

Disadvantages: Greed, Overweight, Odious Personal Habit (burps classical symphonies when bored)

Quirks: like to bite people after grappling them.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Western Australia's' south east)-14, Brawling-15, Boxing-14, Guns (pistol)/TL5-13,

Equipment: several large metal rings on three middle fingers of right hand (fist does +1 damage)

NPC Team Members

ST 11, DX 12, IQ 9, HT 10
Speed 5.5 Move 5 Dodge 5

Skills: Brawling-14, Guns(rifle)/TL5-13, Guns(pistol)/TL5-12

Equipment: none.

Obstacles on the Run

Ngadjunma Warrior

5'7", 110 lbs., dark brown skin, simple hide belts, bushy black hair, red-and-white ochred faces, ritual scars on chest and arms.

ST 9, DX 13, IQ 10, HT 12

Speed 6 Move 6 Dodge 6

Skills: Area Knowledge (tribal area)-14, Broadsword (waddie)-15, First Aid/TL2-13, Navigation/TL-14, Naturalist-15, Spear Thrower-15, Spear Throwing-16, Stealth-16.

Equipment: Waddie (swing crush 1D), Woomera (spear thrower), Throwing Spear (impale 1d-1, with woomera impale 1d)

Creatures of the Night

Cheeroonear ha (The son of Cheeroonear)

ST: 37 **Move/Dodge:** 10/8

DX: 16 **PD/DR:** 2/2

IQ: 12 **Damage:** *claw* 1d+2 cut; *bite* 2d+2 cut *swung rock in hand* 4d crush; thrown rock (30lb stone, range 37') 4d crush; grapple*

HT: 16/40* **Reach:** C,1

Size: 1,2

Weight: 1,100 lbs.

Fatigue: 37

Alertness: 16

Cheeroonear's stooped frame measures around seven feet tall. His body is heavily muscled with thick tufts of hair, huge gnarled hands, and a neck like a thick tree trunk. His chest, however, is thin and hollowed out. His arms are long and often trail on the ground when walking, while his legs cover huge distances when he breaks into a loping run.

Cheeroonear ha's head is his most terrifying feature. It is canine, with tall, alert ears and a long, wide snout from which protrude double rows of one-inch teeth. Under his chin and attached to the bottom of his mouth hangs a membranous sack, similar in design to a pelican, but much larger. When hungry, this sack flaps about like empty folds of skin, barely touching his chest. When Cheeroonear ha feeds, he stores chewed up food in this area for later digestion. He can easily kill eight people, leaving the meat from six of them broken and dismembered in his sack to sustain him over several months. When full, the sack balloons out, filling his hollow chest cavity with a macabre ball of blood, body fluids, human organs, and flesh, easily seen through the membranous wall. This sight requires a Fright Check -10 (if the sack is empty, -6).

The story of Cheeroonear, the dog-faced man, goes back many years. He lived on the Nullabor plain, with a wife and six huge dogs. Though he was extremely powerful, a prophecy had been laid upon him, stating that if he were ever to be seen by men or women, his death would shortly follow. Because of this, Cheeroonear had been very careful. He created his dogs with powerful magics to help him hunt for food -- his favorite being human -- as well as developing a terrifying ability to ambush and suddenly kill so that no one ever saw him. His method was to sneak up behind a victim, then leap feet first into the small of his back. The creature's huge hands would grip his victim's arms before he hit the ground. Once he had them down, standing firmly braced on his back, he would lock his jaws onto the head and twist his huge neck muscles until the head tore free in his mouth.

One harsh summer a drought forced him to visit a waterhole without his usual care, causing a group of similarly drought-stricken humans to catch sight of him. Though too weak to attack, he promised to return before the sun rose again, hoping to beat the prophecy by killing all the people who had seen him.

The people were put much in fear by this promise. The young men thought to hunt the beast with their spears, but a wise old hunter, an ancestor of the Wiradjuri, counseled that this would be foolish. He pointed out that in the night they would never see Cheeroonear, his wife, or his dogs approach due to their legendary stealth, "when death melts like a shadow under the trees, darker than night itself." He counseled the young men to appeal to the Winjarning brothers in the south, the renowned *wirinuns* (sorcerers) who would often help those in need.

The Winjarning brothers knew how Cheeroonear would attack. First he sent his dogs, which they led into a trap and killed one by one with a heavy boomerang, cutting off each of their heads. Then they cut off each of the tails and gave one each to six warriors. The Winjarnings commanded a mist to descend so that when Cheeroonear came to check up on his dogs, he thought he could see them chasing prey through the mist by the dancing tails.

When Cheeroonear came into the camp, confident and relaxed, ready to feast, the Winjarnings clubbed him to death with their waddies.

The wife of Cheeroonear then came to see what had befallen her husband and his pets. The men of the tribe, inspired by the brothers, fell upon the female creature, hacking her clean in two. From the upper part of the terrible body emerged a boy-creature, identical to his horrible parents. The men ran towards him, but he turned himself into a reptile and escaped from under their feet.

This was Cheeroonear ha, the son of Cheeroonear. It has taken him thousands of years to grow and develop into a creature more powerful than his fearsome father was. It also took him many painful years to re-invent the process of creating the demon dogs. But he has finally done it, and believes himself ready to enact revenge on the creatures that destroyed his family, starting with the descendants of that old hunter, the Wiradjuri.

Cheeroonear may attack in many ways (listed above). He particularly enjoys his father's ambush attack. To do this he must have successfully snuck up on his victim (Stealth 30!). Then he executes a reverse flying tackle (since he is actually hitting feet first while his long arms allow him to grapple simultaneously). This has automatic success (from behind), and he has a +4 bonus to his ST for the Contest to succeed in his grapple, though he must make a DX roll -2 to stay on his feet once landing on the treacherous ground of the poor victim's back. If he fails this, he still holds the victim's arms (if the grapple was successful) but he is not perched and ready to strike. Once on the back, he will target either the brain with a bite (all out attack, +4 to hit) in an effort to suck the brain straight from the skull cavity, or the head to dig his teeth into the skull and pull it free from the torso (treat as contest between Cheeroonear ha's ST and victim's ST+ST+HT). He will then swallow the head whole and leave it in his digestive sack to be consumed last of all. The sweetest meat . . .

Cheeroonear ha, unlike his father, has no prophecy hanging over his head, so is able to use his grapple attack from any angle, making him far more dangerous. He may also try tearing limbs from bodies after grappling, if he's in a playful mood (ST vs. ST+ST+HT)

The Monster has the ability to Morph (see p. FF28), which allows him to assume the form of any creature he can see or has memorized (memorized forms are aboriginal man or woman, lizard, eagle, kangaroo, crocodile, bush fly, green ant, venomous black snake, owl, and carp). Size can vary, though mass does not due to the magic altering body density. It takes him one full turn to change or change back again. Clothing can be mimicked, but cannot be removed, as it is actually part of his body. He retains all skills and abilities, gaining only the appearance of the morph and its voice/sound.

It is painful for Cheeroonear ha to remain for more than a short period in a morphed state . . . a legacy from his need to use the power so soon in life. For every minute after the first ten minutes he is morphed, he must make a Will roll to stay in the disguised form, with the target number decreasing by one every ten minutes after. A failure indicates instant return to his true form, plus he is mentally stunned for 1d turns.

Cheeroonear's Dogs

ST: 16 **Move/Dodge:** 12/8 **Size:** 2
DX: 20 **PD/DR:** 2/2 **Weight:** 280 lbs.
IQ: 12 **Damage:** *claw* 1d-2 cut; *bite* 2d+2 cut **Fatigue:** 18
HT: 14/* **Reach:** C

Cheeroonear's dogs are completely devoted to their master and creator. They are an Australian variant of the Hell

Hound, standing nearly as tall as a man at the shoulder, with fearsome two-inch-long razor sharp teeth, though their claws are stunted to aid their cunning (Stealth 25). Their short sleek coats vary between dark brown and a light tan. Their eyes blaze with unnatural intelligence. To look upon one would certainly warrant a Fright Check at -5.

There are only two ways to slay these creatures. First is to strike the head completely from the body, requiring a blow of 14+ cutting damage to the neck and a HT roll failure (consider every 14+ cutting blow to reduce the target number by one). The second is to slay Cheeroonear ha first, which instantly reduces the dog's bodies to the many ingredients from which Cheeroonear ha fashioned them. They have the power of instant regeneration (1HP/turn).

Items of Interest

The Winjarning Boomerang

The Winjarning boomerang is a heavy example of a war boomerang, weighing about five pounds and measuring almost two feet from tip to tip. Made from a heavy, dark wood, its inside edge is lined with flint, giving a solid, sharp edge. Anyone foolish enough to throw it in the hope it will return will soon discover that returning boomerangs were only made as a toy. This item is not designed to return, or even be thrown, as hunting boomerangs are.

Whoever holds this weapon, or keeps it on their person, will find themselves unable to act contrary to the law of the land as they understand it; thus an aboriginal who "steals" a sheep to eat is not acting against the law as far as he understands, while a white man doing the same thing would be. Treat this as a temporary Honesty disadvantage. If the person already has Honesty, the only other side effect is that the boomerang will always seem as light a feather (+1 Accuracy bonus).

The magical endowment placed by the eldest Winjarning upon the boomerang means that when it is especially effective. When used against a dog brought to life by Cheeroonear's magic, it automatically decapitates the animal so long as the neck is targeted and it does at least 1 point of damage.

The Winjarning Waddies

The two waddies (long-handled clubs) created by the younger Winjarning are cut from a blood-red wood, and have very smooth black granite pips worked into the tapered-out ends. They each weigh four pounds and can be wielded one- or two-handed (1H crush swing +1, 2H crush swing +2).

The waddies confer on their holders a +5 Alertness bonus and Danger Sense, though these abilities are lost to that person if he ever acts contrary to any laws as far as he understands (see above).

Used against Cheeroonear, or any of his descendants, the waddies do not receive a penalty to target the head. If used by an Honest man (i.e. has the disadvantage Honesty) it will also do double damage.

All of these items are considered "men's business". If a woman touches one of them she will slowly die of an incurable wasting sickness in around three days (lose 1 HT every six hours until dead).

New Disadvantage

Ticket Of Leave

-5 points

A ticket of leave was the first grant given to a serving convict while his sentence was still being carried out, as a reward for good behavior that allowed some personal freedom. The ticket granted the convict the right to earn money for labor, and to travel at liberty within the boundaries placed upon him in the ticket, though he must produce the ticket on request. To travel beyond the boundaries and be caught would guarantee a swift return to hard labor, with time added on to his sentence.

The Serial Murder Resource Center

A Villain Organization for *GURPS*

by James L. Cambias

Mike Taylor stubbed out his cigarette and felt in his shirt pocket for the pack. It was empty; his third today. He looked down at the crime scene photos spread out on his desk and wished for something a lot stronger than tobacco. He'd seen bodies before, but the way these were cut up made him shiver. The worst part was that the medical examiner said the victims were alive and conscious until the last careful stroke of the knife.

The victims were all local, and that meant the killer was, too. Pine County only had 5,000 people, and Sheriff Taylor knew most of them. The thought that one of them could do this, and do it four times so far, gave him nightmares.

There was a brisk knock on his office door. Taylor smoothed back his hair and straightened his tie. "Come in."

The man who came in was small and neatly-dressed. For some reason he still had his sunglasses on, even though it was after sunset. "Sheriff Taylor? I'm Wayne Harper, from the Serial Murder Resource Center. I'm here to help you."

"This one's pretty bad, Mr. Harper." Taylor gestured at the photographs on his desk. "I'd sure appreciate anything you and the Center can do to stop this."

"Don't worry, Sheriff. We've had plenty of experience with situations like this." Harper extended his hand to shake, and grinned. "Plenty of experience."

The Serial Murder Resource Center is a well-respected and influential organization devoted to the study of serial murderers and their crimes. Often the SMRC lends a hand when local law-enforcement agencies find themselves trying to cope with a serial killer; in such cases the SMRC can help the police find a culprit in an amazingly short time. The SMRC is privately funded, its agents are discreet and don't try to hog the limelight, and its success record is almost unmatched. There's only one real problem with the Serial Murder Resource Center: its top leadership and many of its field agents are in fact mass killers themselves.

History

The Center was originally established to help fight the wave of serial killers which came to public attention in the 1970s and 1980s. Its founder was Dr. Karl Sellier, a respected criminologist and psychiatrist. Sellier was interested in abnormal psychology, and set up the center with two goals in mind: It would provide a central clearinghouse of information and expertise to aid law enforcement agencies track and catch serial killers, and it would be a facility to study the behavior and psychology of the killers themselves, with an eye to someday preventing their homicidal behavior. Sellier got funding from several major foundations and wealthy individuals, and was able to set up an independent endowment to provide for the Center in perpetuity.

Sellierran the Center until 1987, when the early onset of Alzheimer's Disease forced him to retire. His successor was Cyril Koppel, a young sociologist just out of graduate school who had originally been hired as Sellier's assistant. Koppel was less interested in the law enforcement side of the project, but was utterly fascinated by the prospect of understanding the mind and behavior of serial murderers. In 1991 he began trying to locate serial killers who had not yet attracted police attention in order to study them "in the wild," so to speak. A year later, Koppel made contact with

Elbert Wayne Landry, a truck driver who boasted to him of having murdered more than 24 prostitutes and hitchhikers across the country.

Though Landry never finished high school, he was highly intelligent and well-read, especially in psychology and sociology. He easily manipulated Koppel into going along for some "participant observation" of a serial killer at work. Before long, Koppel was completely enmeshed, unable to expose Landry without revealing his own accessory status in a growing number of capital crimes.

Landry saw how useful the SMRC would be to himself and compulsive killers like him, and began to subtly reshape the institute. Using the Center's records and his own knowledge, Landry made contact with nearly a dozen murderers, and then pressured Koppel into hiring them as field researchers or fellows of the Center. By 1997 more than half the SMRC's employees were actually serial murderers themselves. In that year Cyril Koppel tried to regain control of the Center by emailing anonymous tips to the authorities; Landry had expected something of the sort and Koppel simply disappeared (the police suspected suicide).

The current head of the Serial Murder Resource Center is Dr. Robert W. Jackson, a distinguished-looking scholar in his late forties. Dr. Jackson's actual field of expertise is theology, but he was selected by the Center's trustees after the staff covertly sabotaged the applications and interviews of all the other candidates. With the help of Landry and the Center's extensive archives, Dr. Jackson has made himself an authentic expert on the subject of serial murder. This is only appropriate, since Jackson is himself a multiple murderer (he has persuaded himself that true Christianity requires frequent human sacrifice, and has taken on the job of making up for the shortcomings of most mainstream denominations).

The SMRC now plays a double game. Its researchers and field agents still try to locate serial killers, but instead of helping the police bring them to justice, the Center's new mission is to protect the killers by helping them cover their tracks, and framing innocents to "solve" the cases. Only in cases where the killer is so deranged that he would pose a risk to the Center's secret does the SMRC actually help the authorities catch the guilty.

Assets

The Serial Murder Resource Center is not a big organization. It is headquartered on the campus of the Indiana Institute of Technology in Fort Wayne, in a converted Victorian house. The building holds offices for Dr. Jackson, his assistant Mr. Landry, and two research fellows. The rest of the facility is taken up by a huge library of scientific papers, news reports, FBI files, and other information covering all aspects of the phenomenon of serial murder.

Ever since Dr. Jackson took charge, the SMRC has employed a growing number of field agents. Currently there are nine: six in the United States, one each in Canada and Mexico, and one in Europe. The agents in the U.S. divide the country into six sectors (Northwest, Southwest, Texas-Plains, Midwest, Northeast, and South). Field agents work with law enforcement in their areas, and always try to be on the scene when serial killer activity is suspected. The agents are trained to appear bland and scholarly, but all of them are murderers.

Because the Center has a good reputation among law-enforcement agencies, it has much more influence than its small size would suggest. At little more than a word from one of the SMRC's agents, the FBI and most state and local police are perfectly willing to track or arrest people. This is a power which must be conserved: too many false arrests or bad leads will reduce the Center's influence, so this is best used as an emergency measure, or in conjunction with a frame-up.

Adam W. Hessler, SMRC Field Agent

Adam was recruited by the SMRC four years ago, when a Center operative managed to keep him out of the clutches of the FBI for the murder of three teenagers. Equipped with a new identity and some basic investigation training, he is now one of the SMRC's six regional agents in the United States. Hessler is a compulsive murderer, utterly callous and manipulative, but with the help of the Center he has learned to conceal his activities and avoid suspicion.

On the job, Hessler is bland and professional, the very picture of a dedicated specialist. He doesn't make friends except when he thinks a person could be useful to him, or when he's trying to get close to a prospective victim. Physically, he's unimposing but surprisingly fit (he has channelled many of his compulsions into exercise). Adam is a 120-point character.

ST 12 [20], **DX** 12 [20], **IQ** 12 [20], **HT** 12 [20]
Speed 6, Move 6

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15], Contacts (four major urban police departments and the FBI, 12-, utterly reliable) [32], High Pain Threshold [10], Patron (SMRC) [10]

Disadvantages: Sadism [-15], Secret (has murdered nine people) [-30].

Quirks: Always pays cash, Enjoys living in motels, Only eats fast food, Teetotaler [-4]

Skills: Brawling-12 [1], Criminology-12 [2], Disguise-12 [2], Fast Talk-12 [2], Knife-14 [4], Law-10 [1], Lockpicking-12 [2], Psychology-12 [4], Research-12 [2], Stealth-14 [2]

Using the SMRC

In *GURPS* terms, the Serial Murder Resource Center is a 10-point Enemy: a medium group of competent individuals, appearing rarely (6-). It can also be a Patron organization worth 10 points (medium group, plus 5 for its contacts and influence, appearing rarely). Adventurers may become involved with the SMRC in several ways. First of all, law enforcement characters may find themselves working with a helpful "serial killer expert" from the Center as they try to track down a killer. The detectives may be puzzled when the SMRC agent identifies a suspect despite all their evidence pointing at someone else. In a more Hitchcockian vein, the player characters could wind up being framed for a series of murders as part of an SMRC operation to protect the real killer. Can the heroes prove their innocence when the nation's leading authorities say otherwise?

Campaign Use

The SMRC can fit into a surprisingly broad range of *GURPS* campaign settings, from *Steampunk* to *Traveller*, although it fits best in a modern-day campaign.

Steampunk and Cliffhangers: Give the Serial Murder Resource Center a more Victorian-sounding name and mission, and it can fit into a Steampunk or Cliffhangers campaign just fine. The Royal Murder Institute was founded to study all forms of homicide, but nowadays is run by a board of killers ranging from anarchist assassins, gangster hit men, crazed killers, and a few callous "artists of death." The head of the organization is the real Jack the Ripper (whoever that may be in your campaign).

Illuminati: In the world of the Conspiracy, a group like the SMRC is a valuable resource for its secret masters. The Center has a pool of expert killers, and can easily frame inconvenient meddlers as monstrous murders. The only question is who controls the Center? Is it the deadly Society of Assassins, the inhuman minions of Cthulhu, or the mysterious UFOs? Maybe the Center is a wild card in the plots of the Illuminati, selling its services to the highest bidder.

Cyberpunk: Move things forward in time a few decades and give the Center's agents and research fellows an arsenal of built-in weaponry, and it becomes a properly corrupt adversary group for futuristic outlaw heroes. If the world contains autonomous AIs, some of the Center's serial killers may lurk in cyberspace. Cloning and braintaping could make it possible for the SMRC to keep backup copies of mass murderers in suspended animation, so that even killing them won't stop them for long.

Supers: Detective superheroes may work with the Center on several cases before the awful secret of its true agenda comes to light. To give the SMRC's operatives a fighting chance, give them some kind of mystic or ultratech equalizer, like vibroblades or soul-drinking daggers which can harm even the toughest superhero.

Horror: For a game of gritty modern horror, play up the gruesome nature of the murders being investigated, and let the heroes slowly realize what a den of monsters lurks behind the helpful SMRC. For a more cosmic kind of horror, perhaps the SMRC doesn't really recruit killers; instead, constantly studying the habits of murderers turns the staff into bloodthirsty madmen. Are the PCs heading that way themselves?

From the Files: Adventure Seeds

Race

The heroes are in a race and they don't even know it. They're tracking a killer who moves from town to town and follows an obscure pattern in his crimes. But a field agent of the SMRC is also looking for the same killer, and is throwing as many obstacles as he can in the path of the PCs, while simultaneously trying to find out what they know in order to locate the murderer.

A Familiar Face

If the heroes have had a run-in with a mad killer in the past, they may be startled to see him (or her) identified as a respectable "serial murder expert" from the SMRC helping the police with a difficult case. Naturally, the killer has a completely new identity, and the Center's bosses confirm that he has nothing to do with the murderer the player characters remember. If they decide to start digging, the SMRC will mobilize its considerable resources to stop them.

Revenge

Bob Wilson went to jail ten years ago, convicted of five sadistic murders. An SMRC expert helped the police catch him and put him away, despite Wilson's claims of innocence. Now Wilson has broken out of jail, and a massive manhunt is underway to catch him. The heroes may either be lawmen on the trail of an escaped monster, or innocent citizens who get involved by accident. Will the PCs believe the word of an escaped mass murderer who claims he was framed, or the prestigious SMRC?

Pyramid Review

Star Trek Roleplaying Game -- Player's Guide

Published by [Decipher Inc.](#)

Written by Matthew Colville, Kenneth Hite, Ross S. Isaacs, Steven S. Long, Don Mappin, Christian Moore & Owen Seyler

Illustrated by Kieran Yanner

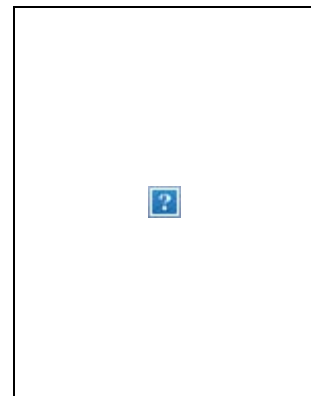
250 color pages; \$29.95

Apart from *Metamorphosis Alpha/Gamma World*, there probably have not been so many attempts made at one setting as there have been for the *Star Trek* license. There have been four *Star Trek* RPGs to date: a skirmish game from Heritage Models, Inc. (thanks to Bob Portnell for bringing that one to my attention), the 80s version from FASA, the first roleplaying visit to the *Star Fleet Battles* universe with *Prime Directive*, and the 90s incarnation using their ICON system from Last Unicorn Games. With a sixth on the way -- the *Prime Directive* rework "Powered by *GURPS*" -- what of the fifth, released from Decipher Inc. . . . a company better known for their collectible card games? Well, it should be pointed out that the new *Star Trek Roleplaying Game* is actually a second stab at the setting for the designers of the Last Unicorn Games version; so does this make the new game ICON version two, or something completely different?

Of course, the ICON system is now unavailable, so the team has created a new one called "CODA," which will also be powering Decipher's *Lord of the Rings RPG*. Out go the handful of six-sided dice and the drama die in ICON, to be replaced by just a pair of six sided dice under CODA. To attempt any action (or test, as it is known in CODA) both dice are rolled to beat a Target Number. This total is added to a character's skill, plus modifiers from attributes, circumstances, and equipment. A successful roll made by up to four over the Target Number is only marginal -- some minor setbacks or complications have happened. A complete success, on the other hand, is five above the Target Number . . . and a roll of ten over means an extraordinary success! The degree of marginal success seems rather high, and has been reduced in the *Narrator's Guide* so only rolling the Target Number exactly gives such a result. Target Numbers run from Simple (5), Routine (10), Challenging (15), Difficult (20), and Virtually Impossible (25). In place of the drama die in ICON, should double sixes be rolled on a test, another die is thrown and added to achieve a total. Should this single die also come up a six, it is thrown again and added. This can continue as long as a six is rolled each time.

Beginning characters have a starting limit of six on their skills, though characters designed with a balanced mix of skill levels will have skills ranging from three through five. Thus with various modifiers a character should be able to make routine tests most of the time with some setbacks, as well as challenging tests to a slightly lesser degree. For fans of the ICON system, it should be noted that the CODA system favors character skills a bit more, although the random element is greater.

Where each of the core rulebooks from Last Unicorn concentrated upon a single series -- *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *The Original Series* -- the focus for Decipher's *Star Trek Roleplaying Game* is actually all four series together. The *Player's Guide* still looks at each series in turn, providing an overview of the period during which it takes place in the *Star Trek* timeline, highlighting notable events during the series' era, and then suggesting the type of adventures that a Narrator could run set at this time. Thus for *The Original Series* -- which includes the first six



movies -- we are told about the "wild frontier" status of the Federation and her neighbors; important events during this time included the Organian Armistice and the Conference of Babel of 2267, right up to the Khitomer Accords at the end of the twenty-third century. Possible adventures include encountering and dealing with new civilizations, life forms, and technological terrors, or plying the space lanes as rough-and-tumble merchants and free traders. In addition to information on each series, a solid timeline gives yet more events for each of the four series, and more suggestions for campaigns that could be running during each era. The timeline runs up to the end of the war with the Dominion depicted at the end of *DS9*; that is as far as the official history goes . . .

While it does not really discuss the period of Captain Archer's *Enterprise* in any detail, the *Player's Guide* does tell you in a short sidebar how adventures could be run similar to those of the crew of the NX-01. The timeline also comes with a map of *Star Trek's* political geography. While scant on detail, it does at least show the relative position of the Federation and its neighbors . . . something that was woefully (and irritatingly) lacking in the Last Unicorn RPGs.

To support the whole breadth of the *Star Trek* milieu, players can design both civilian and Star Fleet characters, depending on whatever style of game the Narrator plans to run. The process of character generation under CODA is slightly different to that of ICON, but the same principles show through in both. Under ICON, the process involved selecting a racial template, then applying a Branch (for Star Fleet characters) or other professional Overlay, before picking smaller packages that represented the character's Early Life, Academy Life, Cadet Cruise, and any Tours of Duty. Under CODA, the player selects a species and a profession, generates attributes, and then chooses skills and traits by taking one Professional and one Personal Development Package.

The ten races available in the *Player's Guide* are the Bajorans, Betazoids, Cardassians, Ferengi, Humans, Klingons, Ocampa, Talaxians, Trill, and Vulcans; each of them receives a two-page spread that explain both the race and its in-game particulars. This is a reasonable mix of species, though in all likelihood it will fail to please everyone. For example, many may feel that the inclusion of the Ocampa and the Talaxians is a waste of space and too specific to the Delta Quadrant; Other races found in the Alpha and Beta Quadrants could have been included instead to better effect, such as the Andorians and the Tellarites. But since the Decipher version of the *Star Trek RPG* is trying to cover all four series, the Ocampa and the Talaxians are included with good reason. Thankfully, the Andorians -- along with the Orions and Romulans -- will be detailed in the *Narrator's Guide*. (As an aside, it should also be pointed out that the differences between the Klingons from *The Original Series* and those from the movies and the *The Next Generation* era are left out of their entry. This difference was at least covered in the ICON *Star Trek: The Original Series* RPG.) It is possible to create mixed species characters, but narrators should be forewarned; the method is open to abuse from the players, as it is easy to generate uber-characters . . .

A player has a choice of seven professions: Diplomat, Merchant, Mystic, Rogue, Scientist, Soldier, and Starship Officer. The latter is further broken down into Command (covering actual command, helm control and navigation), Operations (communications, engineering, security, and mission operations), and Science (medical doctor, counselor, and actual science officer). A profession provides a list of skills particular to that career, making them less costly to buy than non-professional skills. It also describes a number of professional abilities particular to that career. Each professional ability represents an aspect of a character's job beyond its skills; there are eight listed for each profession, arranged into three tiers.

The nearest analogy to the concept of "professional abilities" are the "feats" found in *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*. Thus a diplomat might take the "Bluff" ability to offset any social penalty when they make a Persuade skill roll to bluff, or the "Insight" ability that provides an extra die to a Savvy reaction test against lie attempts (the diplomat rolls three six-sided dice instead of two and ignores the lowest). As a campaign progresses a character can pick more abilities, including those from the second and third tiers. Some of these have prerequisites, either other abilities or other various factors. For example, the diplomat would need to have the Insight ability if he wants to take "Anticipate Opponent" ability, a Politics Skill of three or more for the "Power Player" ability, or a Renown of three or more for "Great Reputation" ability. Additionally, some abilities can be upgraded for multiple or enhanced effect.

Professional abilities are listed for just Star Fleet officers and also for Elite Professions. These include Starship Engineer and Counselor, as well as for Command, Flight Control, Medical, Operations, Science and Security Officers. All Starfleet characters receive the "Starship Duty" ability for free, and can then pick another from their Elite

Profession. In many cases the Starship Duty ability is a prerequisite to those listed under the Elite Professions.

The six basic character attributes -- Strength, Intellect, Agility, Vitality, Presence, and Perception -- can be created by rolling dice, or by picking set scores and modifying them with bonus points. Under the random method, two dice are thrown a total of nine times and the lowest three results discarded. The results are further modified by the character's race. High attribute scores provide modifiers for use during tests; in addition, these modifiers also become a character's Reaction scores. Each Reaction score covers a character's ability to deal with or resist various factors: Quickness covers reaction time and reflexes; Savvy works against lie, bluff attempts and measures how well you can hide your intentions; Stamina against poison, endurance tests and pain; and Willpower against attempts to influence or interrogate you, against telepathic probes, and is also used if you want to make a greater effort.

Once attributes have been created, a character makes their first skill picks. Doubling the Intellect score provides the number of levels that can be taken in Species Skills: Culture, History, Language, World Knowledge, Politics and Religion. Then two more packages provide more skills; a character takes one from the Personal Development list and another from Professional Development list particular to their chosen Profession. Unlike the ICON system, these packages are actually quite flexible, so that two characters can take the same one but modify them, as is their wont. A package gives a mix of set skills and player choice, as well as a selection of Edges -- the equivalent to ICON's advantages, to choose from. A Professional Development package provides more skills than a Personal Development one does, but players will need to modify the set skills received with their free skill picks if they are to meet the basic skill requirements for their chosen Profession.

For example, if you want to create a Tom Paris-like character, you might take the "Starfleet Brat" Personal Development package, and the "Hotshot Pilot" Professional Development package from those listed under the Starship Command Officer list. A Doctor Bashir-like character would apply the "Genetic Re-sequencing" for their Personal Development and "Ship's Doctor" for their Professional Development. A member of the Maquis might have "Colony/Frontier Upbringing" for their Personal Development and "Guerrilla" from the Soldier list for their Professional Development.

At each stage of generation, a character can select another edge in return for receiving a flaw. There are more edges listed than flaws; until more are given, it should be possible to raid ICON books for the many given there. Again, some flaws and edges can be upgraded (like Ally, Command, Contacts, Promotion, and Quick Draw for edges, and Enemy, Pacifism, and Rival for flaws). In some cases, a flaw or edge actually has a prerequisite that must be fulfilled before it can be selected; the "Infamy" flaw requires a Renown score of three or more, and your Presence attribute must be six or above if you want to the "Confident" edge.

Of course, if players want to get started immediately, they can skip the generation process and take one of the six ready-to-play archetypes found at the front of the *Player's Guide*. All that they need are the addition of five skill picks (in other words, buy another five levels' worth of skills) and then they are ready to go . . . Well, almost, because it would appear that all six character archetypes to lack the species-specific skills that all characters get for free.

The character creation system generates characters with skills roughly the equivalent of Starfleet Academy graduates, but the layout of the Player's Guide hampers the process. Whereas it was quick and intuitive under the ICON rules, here it is anything but. The problem is that there is no one page that explains the process in adequate detail, and players will find themselves flipping back to earlier sections of the book. A double-page spread at the front of the book does explain the character sheet and lists the process of character generation, but not in enough depth. The process is also hampered by inconsistent examples given at each stage; different characters are used throughout. The problem could have been remedied had there been one -- if not two -- character examples provided that took the reader through the generation process from start to finish, referencing the relevant sections as necessary. As a result, the whole process feels slightly stiff, and does not get across the flexibility that the designers clearly want it to have.

Those used to the ICON system will find that the skills are a mixture of the familiar and the different in the CODA rules. Some are dropped, such as Command (which becomes an Edge) and the Personal Equipment Use skill. In its stead a character just uses that piece of equipment, such as a Tricorder, which provides a bonus to an appropriate score (say Medicine, if scanning for the presence of a poison or virus). Some skills can have specialties, which can be taken

just the once to provide a bonus in tests. Elsewhere, some skills have been folded into others. For example, where ICON had "Vehicle Operations (Shuttlecraft) 1 (2)," the skill of shuttlecraft piloting under CODA is part of the System Operation skill, under the Flight Control specialty. Certainly the individual skill entries are better explained, and the test section tells exactly how the skill works, including suggestions for each level of difficulty.

Characters no longer earn skill points to spend on improving their attributes, skills and so on. Instead the narrator awards them experience points. When they accumulate a thousand, they can be put through an "advancement." This provides the character with five picks which can be spent to improve skills, specialties, renown, courage, attributes, or acquire a new edge or Professional Ability. Essentially, just about any aspect of a character can be improved. How experience points are earned and how many are awarded has been left for the *Narrator's Guide* to fully explain. A page is given over to creating more advanced characters, but no example is provided to explain the process. Eventually, a character can advance to Elite Professions, like Adept, Ambassador, Assassin, Envoy, Explorer, Free Trader, Inventor, Mercenary, Smuggler, Special Forces, Spy, Weapon Master. Though they have higher prerequisites, they work like the other professions in the *Player's Guide*, providing new professional abilities. These Elite Professions give possible long-term goals or career paths for the players to set their characters along, which is very useful for civilian characters.

The book includes a solid list of equipment and weapons, as well as an explanation of starships and their systems. Additionally the setting material covers the Federation in reasonable detail. Together with the timeline, a Narrator has enough information to get a game going . . . though he will certainly need the *Narrator's Guide* fairly soon. Rounding out the book is an appendix covering personal combat under the CODA system; ship-to-ship battles will probably be covered in the forthcoming *Narrator's Guide*. Personal combat flows along fairly well, and characters have a greater survival rate than in ICON, as they have an inherent Defense value. This replaces the old Dodge skill (which not every character possessed). Another nice touch is that most characters have a greater amount of Health or hit points than in ICON. This benefits human and similar characters in particular, as they were pretty fragile under the ICON system.

Despite the claims on the back cover of the *Player's Guide*, it is not "easy" to convert material or characters from previous *Star Trek* RPGs into the CODA system. Conceptually it probably is easy -- more so from the ICON mechanics -- but a set of direct conversion guidelines are not given here.

Presentation-wise, the *Player's Guide* is very nicely laid out and liberally illustrated with photographs from the *Star Trek* television series and the movies. The only original art appears in the six archetypes; while it is good to see Kieran Yanner's work in color, his style is rather lanky, which gives rise to a decidedly skinny-looking Ferengi. Finally, it should be pointed out that the double-sided character sheet is attractively done in pastel colors, but certainly produces an ugly -- and near-useless -- photocopy in black and white.

Of course the *Player's Guide* does not contain everything that the GM will need to know, for which the *Narrator's Guide* is an absolute must. That said, there is nothing to stop the GM from raiding whatever *Star Trek RPG* sourcebooks they may have to support their game under the new CODA rules. Further, although it may seem expensive to have to pay for both the *Player's Guide* and the *Narrator's Guide* separately, it should be pointed out that together they cover the first four *Star Trek* series, as opposed to having to buy a separate book for each one.

Despite the poor organization and explanation of character creation -- which certainly becomes easier with practice -- the *Player's Guide* is a useful box of tools for running a game during any of the *Star Trek* time periods. As to the rules and mechanics, some may see it as a step back in terms of design, but really it represents a chance for designers to regroup and rethink through the problems inherent in the ICON mechanics. Even so, the heritage of the ICON system is clearly evident in the CODA system, making it a much-improved ICON version two, but still different enough to have its own identity.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review



Marvel HeroClix: Infinity Challenge

Published by [WizKids](#)

Designed by **Jordan Weisman, Monte Cook, Mike Mulvihill, and Jeff Quick**

Starter Pack, \$19.99; Booster Pack, \$6.99

Marvel HeroClix: Infinity Challenge is the third of WizKids HeroClix games, following the fantasy-themed *MageKnight* and the subterranean-crawling *MageKnight: Dungeons*.

Like its predecessors, *Marvel HeroClix* is a collectable miniatures game sold in Starter Packs and Boosters. In a Starter Pack you get 8 random pre-painted miniatures, a two-sided 3' x 3' paper map, rules, reference cards, dice, and markers. It's quite a deal for \$20.

Marvel HeroClix is a superhero tactical miniatures game. You and your opponents pick a point total, assemble a team from your miniatures, and battle each other in a variety of environments. The map included with the game includes a generic mall on one side, and a generic outdoor area on the other. Fortunately any square grid map will work for the game, so you can pull out your *d20* or *Frag* maps, or dispense with maps all together in favor of a ruler and wargame terrain.

Included with the game are five scenarios. In "Challenge of the Champions," the heroes are teleported to an alien dimension and forced to battle each other in a frenzied free-for-all. "The Scientist" charges players with either kidnapping or protecting a scientist with a secret. "Stand Aside!" is a simple scenario where one side must push their way through the map. "Winner Takes All" is a capture-the-flag variant, where the side holding an ancient artifact after 10 turns wins. Lastly, "Mind Switch" randomly assigns powers or curses on heroes as they fight. Overall, the scenarios aren't especially inspiring. It would have been welcome to have a wider variety of objectives and situations. Why not one powerful miniature (say, Quasar at 122 points by himself!) against a horde of gun-toting grunts? Where are the jail breaks? The bank robberies? The epic battles on the Statue of Liberty? Clever players won't have a hard time devising their own scenarios, though it's a disappointment the rules didn't provide more interesting ones.

The rules to the game are straightforward, and nearly identical to *MageKnight*'s:

On your turn, you are given one action for every 100 points of miniatures you are fielding. A typical game is 200 points, which is usually around three to six miniatures. Activating a miniature counts as an action; you can move, attack in close combat, fire a ranged shot, or use a super power. Once you have activated a hero, you can't activate him on the following turn unless you "Push" him, in which case he takes a click damage. Once you've Pushed a hero, he can't be Pushed again on the next turn; he must take a breather and pass.

The Push mechanic forces players to be tactical, coordinate their team, and plan in advance. How you activate your heroes makes a huge difference in the outcome of the game. A player that knows when to Push and when to "rest" his miniatures will easily defeat a player who recklessly charges into battle, or doesn't use his force as a team. A hero caught stranded without backup will get KO'd quickly in this game, which not only emulates a lot of comic books, but makes for a more interesting game.

On each character's click base are four attributes: Speed, Damage, Attack, and Defense. When you attack another character, you roll 2 six-sided dice and add your Attack value. If the sum exceeds your foe's Defense, you hit, and do

as many "clicks" damage to him as your Damage attribute. As characters are wounded, their attributes and super powers degrade until they are finally KO'd and out of the game.

Various super powers are represented by colored boxes on the attribute dial. So if your Defense has a green box around it, you have an Energy Shield and your character's Defense is increased by 2 against missile attacks. These powers are the game's strength . . . and a frustrating weakness. There are over 30 super powers in the game, but you'll have to constantly refer to the reference card in your first few games before you finally memorize what they do. Since abilities come and go as the character gets wounded (for example, a wounded character may lose his Leadership but gain Battle Fury), you'll be forced to squint at the miniature constantly during those early games. Players who are colorblind may have serious trouble with this game. Even players with hawk eyes might have a hard time differentiating orange from red on the dial.

A nice touch was the inclusion of team super powers. Some characters have team symbols on them, such as the Fantastic Four, X-Men, or Skrulls. Team abilities enhance other members of the same team, and provide a reason to field similar characters instead of creating create a strange lineup of villains and heroes . . . though that's certainly possible (and probable unless you buy some extra Boosters). Similarly, certain characters' plastic bases are different colors. If two miniatures have the same colored base, they are "arch-enemies," and receive double victory points for defeating their rival. So when Wolverine and Sabertooth are on opposing sides, watch out -- you know the battle will revolve around them. This is a nice nod to the comics, and provides additional depth.

Fans of the *MageKnight* game will notice a few differences in the rules. First, there is no facing in the game; everyone can attack 360-degrees. Characters are allowed to fire into close combat, too. There are also rules for knockback (if you roll doubles), smashing through walls, and picking up and throwing heavy objects . . . like engine blocks and forklifts!

The initial release of the *Marvel HeroClix* includes 150 different characters, though many are duplicated and differ only in their abilities; there are usually three variations of a hero -- Rookie, Experienced, and Veteran. The first wave of miniatures includes a good selection of Marvel favorites. You'll find Professor X, Spider-Man, Hulk, Blade, Wolverine, Daredevil, Magneto, Captain America, and a whole host of lesser known heroes and villains, as well as henchmen and thugs to make the game more interesting. Noticeably missing are any of the Fantastic Four (despite their team power listed in the reference guide . . . a sure sign of a future expansion!), Storm, Captain Marvel, Iron Man, Venom, the Green Goblin, and Thor.

The paint jobs on the miniatures are mediocre to good. Generally, the less human a figure looks, the better it looks! Faces are usually blobs of tan paint; anyone wearing a mask is a prettier miniature. They're made of soft plastic, so you can dump them in a box without much fear of damaging them. Unfortunately, the glue on their feet has a tendency to come undone (especially as you click their bases), so keep some super glue handy.

Overall, the game really captures the pace and chaos of superhero battles. If you can overcome the initial learning curve and resist the urge to buy ten more Booster Packs just so you can have a black-suited Spider-Man (the rarest of the bunch), you'll find *Marvel HeroClix* a fun, light game suitable for a wide age and experience range. The fact that a good-sized super battle takes about an hour to play makes it a great candidate for a lunchtime break.

And for those of you wishing for Superman, the Green Lantern, and Batman, fear not -- WizKids is planning a DC version of the game by the end of the year!

--J.C. Connors

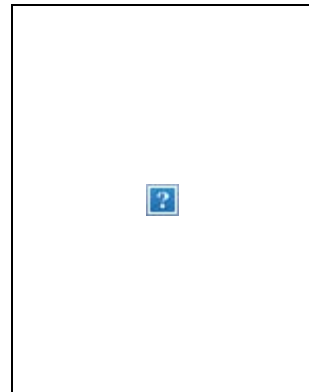
Pyramid Review

Psionics Toolkit (for d20)

Written by Mike Mearls

Published by [Fiery Dragon](#)

56 b&w pages; \$11.95



Despite the fact that psionics have been a part of the *Dungeons & Dragons* system for decades, and despite the fact that the *3rd edition* has done more than any previous edition to make them part of the core rules, many people still don't feel comfortable adding them into a campaign. Perhaps the lack of campaign information in the *Psionics Handbook* is to blame, or it could be that Wizards of the Coast felt that the "Mind Lords of Talaron" article in *Dragon* #281 would enable new players and GMs to mesh traditional fantasy with psionics. The folks at Fiery Dragon disagree, and have created the *Psionics Toolkit*, an aid for Game Masters and players to help them in adapting psionics into a standard fantasy campaign. Even better, it's written by Mike Mearls, a name quickly becoming associated with *d20* quality. Does that trend continue here?

Broken up into seven chapters, each one helps in different ways to bring psionics into the game. The first chapter, Twelve Questions About Psionics, forces the GM to examine how psionics fit in his world by answering some simple questions that have an important impact on the world. For example, how do mages and psions get along? What role do psychic warriors have in the setting? How long have psionics been around? How do merchants and nobles see psions?

Chapter Two, People, Places and Things, provides a few methods of introducing psionics to a campaign that's never used them before. The Vaniar are an offshoot of humanity that are isolated from the rest of the world, banished when their civilization became advanced under the instruction of their god, Athius. These humans have bonuses to intelligence but suffer penalties to charisma due to their isolated nature. Their favored class is, of course, Psion or Psychic Warrior (one or the other, not both). Another method of introducing psionics, the Monolith of Maurimar, is presented. This black slab is actually the home for the lyphillians, a race of pure thought. The lyphillians can possess those who study the runes about the monoliths surface; some of those that have already "escaped" are evil and must be stopped by the good lyphillians who feel responsible for their presence. The third section of this chapter is Olvic's Gang, a group of children raised by a witch who imbued the children with psionic powers that she would later steal by sacrificing the children. Unfortunately for the witch, the children proved too powerful for her; after slaying her, they have been making their way in the world. Without the parental guidance of the witch though, these children are dangerous adversaries that wise party members would do well to treat as full-fledged menaces.

Another group, the Monks of the Invisible Fist, is an example of how to tweak the *d20* rules to allow monks to have some psychic skills and abilities without changing the core class too much. The Vinduul of the Unspoken Thought is a religion that focuses on Vinduul, a cult-like religion with many splinter churches and factions under its umbrella. Vinduul is the god of psionics, unspoken secrets, lost knowledge, and forgotten lore.

Chapter Three, Classes, is very brief. The Psychic Thief is a prestige class that utilizes psionic abilities to augment a rogue's natural talents, while the Beastmaster is a primal lord of animals and beasts. Both are 10-level prestige classes with full details, including special abilities by level, power discovered, power points per day, and ideas on how to use these prestige classes in your own campaign.

This chapter ends with the cleric domain, psionics. It provides psionic domain spells for 1st through 9th level, as well as a granted power. Unfortunately, the domain relies on the worshipper to already have a level of psion or psychic warrior, and allows the cleric to sacrifice a cleric spell and gain psionic points equal to the spells level. This isn't very

useful if you only have a level or two as a psion. (One also has to wonder, why is this in chapter three instead of two?)

Chapter Four, Organizations, provides the GM with ideas on how to generate organizations with something similar to a town stat block. This includes Name, Alignment, Membership, Level, Resources, Activity, Influence, Fame, Legal Status, Goals, Typical Members, Notable Holdings, Notable Activities, and Leadership. The sample organization is the Band of the Opened Eye, a group that acts as a meeting place for psionic information. The detailed organization, the Order of the Broken Staff, is a guild of wizards that deals with psionics due to several of their adventuring comrades being slain by evil psions. Now they've developed the means and the organization to handle individuals who have such power. The head of the guild -- as well as several of his followers -- are detailed with new magic items to counter psionics.

Chapter Five, Psionics in Established Campaigns, provides guidelines on how to change characters so that they now have levels in psionic classes. It provides a brief mechanic to do this, as well as a method of introducing psionics via plague. The chapter is a little short and the plague idea looks like it too would fit in better at Chapter Two.

Chapter Six, New Monsters, has the solarian cat, a panther looking feline with the ability to communicate via telepathy and minor psionics. Also included are the cryscorn (a psionic based unicorn) and the psionic drake, with age categories from wyrmling to great wyrm. New templates include the lyphillian (introduced in chapter two), the psi-killer (a virus that becomes active when an individual with psionic powers is about), and the battle thrall (a slave to the mind flayers that's undergone tremendous change under their cruel tendrils).

Chapter Seven, Characters, provides the GM with several pre-designed characters. These range from the high-level psychic warrior Clarius Verrazi to the beastmaster Kiran Whitefeather, among others. Strangely enough, there is no example of a psychic thief or any of the prestige classes from the *Psionics Handbook*.

The book is laid out in standard two-column format, with black-and-white line drawings breaking up the text. Art ranges from good to average. The interior cover is a black and white copy of the color cover, with a twist: it labels all the characters and creatures so that the GM has a visual guide to the book. The rear cover is an ad for *Of Sound Mind*, a psionic-based adventure and a good tie in to this product, as well as the *Counter Collection II*.

The book feels light. It's like there were so many things that could have been put into the book, but were left out due to space considerations. The page count is a little off from the standard 64, and it shows in the lack of feats, psionic powers, magic items, and prestige classes. Strangely enough, the default home setting of the Fiery Dragon adventures, Karathis, is heavy in psionics, as psions and sorcerers in times past clashed over the fate of the world; there isn't any information on how this material relates to Karathis. Hopefully some or all of these will be making their way to us via Fiery Dragon's Web Site.

Experienced GMs who want a flood of new crunchy material to add to their current campaign aren't going to like this book. Those who are new to psionics and new to the *3rd edition* of *Dungeons & Dragons* will find a valuable resource in the *Psionics Toolkit*.

--Joe Kushner

Robin's Laws Illuminated

"[T]he truth remains that, in roleplaying, stereotypes are extremely useful. They provide a common set of assumptions about the world and the kinds of PCs who populate it."

-- Robin D. Laws, *Robin's Laws of Good Game Mastering*

In his deceptively slim tome, Robin Laws argues forcefully that roleplaying games have to be tuned to the needs and desires of the players rather than those of the game world or even the GM. This can pose something of a challenge in games seemingly designed to thwart, baffle, and harass player characters -- such as games of [conspiracy](#) and High Weirdness. However, the GM wishing to illuminate Robin's laws should realize two great truths: if the characters seem too at ease, the game can always get weirder on command; and the players are not the same as the characters. I've already written the [odd column](#) on the first point; the second point is one that Robin addresses with his breakdown of "player types" and the attendant discussion in his book. (If you haven't read Robin's book, well, shame on you -- but the player types should become obvious as you read further.) To aid GMs trying to marry Robin's typologies to *Suppressed-Transmission*- style games, here's a few elements, concepts, and approaches, and advisories for each of Robin's player types keyed to the ten *Illuminati* groups. Scoop them into your games as needed; sprinkled into player goal charts and adventure design boxes, they can help catalyze ideas, if only of the "Brian would go for that -- if it were about the Templars . . ." sort. First and foremost, however, like the [alphabets](#) I've done in the past, these elements will hopefully let your players feel "at home" in the world where their characters don't have to.

Adepts of Hermes

- **The Power Gamer:** Wants to obtain the Sword of Paracelsus, the Spear of Destiny, the alkahest, and secret magicks for which mortals are not ready, especially Words (duh) of Power. "Do what I will shall be the whole of the Law."
- **The Butt-Kicker:** Wants to kill mummies, demons, vampires, and evil magicians, especially ones without bulletproofing rituals. Would suspend any amount of disbelief for a dragon.
- **The Tactician:** Wants detailed and predictable rituals, especially ones written by Isaac Newton; enjoys abusing crystal balls and other scrying (pronounced "surveillance") magic. Since most evil magicians have poor decision-making skills, they fall into the Tactician's ambushes with gratifying frequency.
- **The Specialist:** Common specialist types include the "John Constantine" cynical street-magician, the magically-aware feline familiar, and the burglar who stole the wrong antique pendant.
- **The Method Actor:** Craves intense rituals, dickering with powerful spirits, and searching for the Holy Grail.
- **The Storyteller:** Always on the lookout for the quest object: the Ring of the Nibelungs makes a good choice. Will gladly riddle the bridge-trolls.
- **The Casual Gamer:** Will recognize fairies, Merlin, and Atlantis.

Bavarian Illuminati

- **The Power Gamer:** Either rising within the hierarchy, or a rising threat to it. Digs the whole MiB look. Saving up for black helicopter lessons, downloaded through the Orbital Mind Control Lasers if possible.
- **The Butt-Kicker:** Wants to kill other MiBs, CIA/FSB thugs, UN peace-forcers, and inconvenient witnesses. Just likes the sound of the word "chain gun."
- **The Tactician:** Enjoys using psychotronic gear ("Look into the headlights, please.") and tapping into the KH-11 satellite feeds. The more initials and acronyms, the better.
- **The Specialist:** Common specialist types include the "surveillance nerd", the clued-in reporter, and the shadowy wet-work psycho.
- **The Method Actor:** Trusts no one. Enjoys paranoid discussions of betrayal and lies; ideally with mysterious NPCs rather than fellow party members.
- **The Storyteller:** Would prefer that the mysterious CD-ROM, warehouse files, or military database have a few red flags for the next layer of the onion -- try a neat codeword ("GIZA Clearance Only") as a tag for such

things.

- **The Casual Gamer:** Will recognize any black, unmarked vehicle or agent.

Bermuda Triangle

- **The Power Gamer:** Knowing about interdimensional gateways isn't as cool as being them. Will put up with weird ultraterrestrial DNA that feeds him plot hooks as long as it heals wounds instantly.
- **The Butt-Kicker:** Wants to kill clones, gill-men, enemy submarines, enemy frogmen, and giant squids. *Really* wants to kill robot sea monsters.
- **The Tactician:** Won't mind fluctuating dimensions as long as the enemy still thinks two-dimensionally.
- **The Specialist:** Common specialist types include the "heir to Tesla" engineer, the shapeshifting mermaid princess, and the pointless alien.
- **The Method Actor:** Might explore amnesia, being ripped away from one's proper time or dimension, or any inner alienation to reflect the outer Strangeness.
- **The Storyteller:** Craves identifiers: "Bermuda Triangle," "Philadelphia Experiment," "ley lines," and so forth. Will go anywhere, as long as it's somewhere.
- **The Casual Gamer:** Will recognize the Bermuda Triangle, tabloid headlines, Atlantis (again), and possibly Tesla.

Discordians

- **The Power Gamer:** Prefers PCP to LSD, qat to cannabis, coke to heroin, turning up to turning on.
- **The Butt-Kicker:** Wants to kill clowns, faceless men in gray suits, and mimes.
- **The Tactician:** Will be frustrated to the point of overkill by Discordian enemies, unless you slowly escalate the tactics and make the "game-playing" part of the struggle.
- **The Specialist:** Common specialist types include the "holy fool" Malkavian -- er, Discordian -- cultist, the talking dog, the occult poet, and all manner of antisocial freaks.
- **The Method Actor:** "Oh, it's a David Lynch movie." This realization will make them both easier and harder to deal with.
- **The Storyteller:** Will only pick up golden apples labeled "plot."
- **The Casual Gamer:** Will recognize "anarchy" symbol, drug references.

Gnomes of Zurich

- **The Power Gamer:** Money can buy happiness, in the form of guns, gear, cars, toys, and bespoke Armani bulletproof vests. Consider "katana" money: Krugerrands, bearer bonds, uncut emeralds.
- **The Butt-Kicker:** Wants to beat up bank guards, armored car guards, prospectors, museum guards, and other people in the way of riches.
- **The Tactician:** Plans the heist, the rehearsal, the dress rehearsal, the heist of the key item needed for the heist, the rehearsal of the heist of the key item needed for the heist . . .
- **The Specialist:** Common specialist types include the wealthy aristocrat, the superspy connoisseur, and the bored but elegant art thief.
- **The Method Actor:** Fills in the blank: "I pursue money to escape from . . ."
- **The Storyteller:** Follows the money.
- **The Casual Gamer:** Will recognize brand names, Swiss numbered bank accounts.

Network

- **The Power Gamer:** His kung fu had better be the best; overclocks and thrashes and crypto to the max. New codes, new algorithms, puts the "killer" into "killer app."
- **The Butt-Kicker:** Wants to kill firewalls, androids, drones, and NSA goons.

- **The Tactician:** Downloads the schematics; with detailed netrunning rules, becomes the detail-est netrunner there is.
- **The Specialist:** Common specialist types include the streetwise skatepunk hacker, the mysterious hacker who turns out to be a hot babe, and the surveillance nerd, again.
- **The Method Actor:** Does information really want to be free? Would love to play an AI, if possible.
- **The Storyteller:** May or may not thrill to the drama of people typing frantically; will not wait long for download.
- **The Casual Gamer:** Will recognize the NSA, "hacking," and a perhaps surprising amount of jargon.

Shangri-La

- **The Power Gamer:** Psychic power is still power; the more recondite and inapproachable the ancient art or method the better, especially if it includes the words "Shaolin," "dragon," or "heavenly."
- **The Butt-Kicker:** Wants to kill Chinese soldiers, freakish insects, deros, evil monks, and the man who killed his master.
- **The Tactician:** Maneuvers, strikes, blows, grips, and the whole dojo full of options make single combat as thrilling as a pitched battle between the Chang Sing and the Wing Kong on top of the Potala Palace. Well, almost as thrilling.
- **The Specialist:** Common specialist types include the sole surviving practitioner of levitation, the "natural", and Caine (from *Kung Fu*, that is, not *Vampire*).
- **The Method Actor:** The Eightfold Way, the Fivefold Path, and any number of other exotic moral codes add instant depth and tension to a peaceful warrior.
- **The Storyteller:** Will be watching closely to see if this is a John Woo movie, a Tsui Hark movie, or a Ringo Lam movie.
- **The Casual Gamer:** Will recognize Tibet, chi, and the astral plane.

Society of Assassins

- **The Power Gamer:** Craves rate of fire, high calibers, and anything by Glock. Other favorite words include Semtex, Pachmayr, and Ruger. Introduce gun fu and never look back.
- **The Butt-Kicker:** Wants to kill everything! Do you hear me? Everything!
- **The Tactician:** Plans the ambush, the hit, the getaway, the cover up, and the patsy. Seems vaguely disappointed if there's no need for a map of the sewers.
- **The Specialist:** Common specialist types include the ninja, the sniper, and the ninja sniper.
- **The Method Actor:** Kills to cover up a secret.
- **The Storyteller:** Often winds up assigned to kill his mentor, for some reason. Method-actery Storytellers do it on purpose.
- **The Casual Gamer:** Will recognize Lee Harvey Oswald, a curved dagger, and C-4.

Servants of Cthulhu

- **The Power Gamer:** Unless you call it up, you'll never know if you can put it down, now will you?
- **The Butt-Kicker:** Wants to kill evil cultists, mad sorcerors, hideous hybrids, unholy servitors, and anything else preceded by an adjective.
- **The Tactician:** Seems happiest if Elder Signs work, or failing that, if machine-guns do.
- **The Specialist:** Common specialists include the "Van Helsing" (complete with indecipherable Mitteleuropian accent), the hipster madman, and the neurasthenic.
- **The Method Actor:** Will draw up a family tree going back to Dagon and Hydra if you let him. Go ahead and let him.
- **The Storyteller:** Likes following spoor; a common monstrous m.o., the trail of ownership of the tottering mansion or lurid painting, or the flight-path of the whippoorwills. Looks for order to find chaos.
- **The Casual Gamer:** Will recognize Cthulhu.

UFOs

- **The Power Gamer:** Alien implants can be good things. Alien technology is definitely a good thing. Black tech devised to combat alien tech is almost as good.
- **The Butt-Kicker:** Wants to kill Air Force and MJ-12 goons, Greys, Reptoids, Mantids, and anything that wants our women or our water.
- **The Tactician:** In his heart of hearts, wants it all to be an Air Force coverup of secret military aircraft. Prefers stunners to blasters.
- **The Specialist:** Common specialists include the wild-eyed spotter, the tabloid reporter, or the mysterious informant.
- **The Method Actor:** Mulder.
- **The Storyteller:** Scully.
- **The Casual Gamer:** Will recognize crop circles, Area 51, Roswell, and anything out of the first four seasons of *The X-Files*.

History: Yesterday's Beliefs, Today (Or Vice Versa)

So you're playing in or running a historical game. You've striving for some level of accuracy and authenticity (despite the fact that giant steam-powered robots were a bit less common in the real American Civil War than the campaign version). You've got the history researched; you're wrapping your mind around the technology, politics, and mindset of the era; you're ready to live -- and create -- history. And about midway through this planning, you realize:

History really bites.

By this I mean that there are a lot of aspects of history that are really pretty ugly, especially when it comes to trying to recreate them. Legally sanctioned oppressive racism in the United States was a reality until *very* recently, and women were treated as second-class citizens throughout most of the Western world until . . . oh, last Tuesday-ish. (As someone who wasn't cognizant through most of the 1970s, I was shocked to learn that newspapers still had "Jobs for Men/Jobs for Women" distinctions in their classifieds through then.)

I rediscovered that history bites when writing my thin-versus-thick curtain columns over the past month. I realized that, for me personally, the most common "breach" of that wall between player and character actions for myself is in attitudes; I have a habit of transplanting many of my modern values and beliefs into any characters I play in historical games. Thus my twelfth-century English Catholic priest character is much more tolerant towards Muslims, pagans, Irish, women, and werewolves than he almost certainly would have been in the "real" world.

So what's a gamer to do? If you ignore sizable aspects of history, are you still playing a "historical" game? Is it fun to play a character with attitudes you'd find repugnant yourself?

Well, here are some ways to deal with this conundrum.

- **Ignore it.** Remember all those great Westerns from the 40s and 50s that dealt with issues of racism and sexism? Me neither.

Probably the easiest way to "deal" with the issue is simply to ignore it. If there isn't any catalyst that would bring up uncomfortable attitudes, there's no reason for it to ever enter the game.

Of course this is easier in some games than others. While it's easy to avoid the sexism of a 1940s game by simply not having any women around (ala *Saving Private Ryan*), avoiding the jingoistic aspect of World War II is much more difficult. ("That's odd; we've been on the Pacific front for six months, and we haven't encountered *any* Asians . . .")

A nice (if curious) aspect of this technique is that it's not terribly *unrealistic*; if that twelfth-century English priest never encounters any Muslims, then his feelings towards them need never become an issue.

On the other hand, this option can also greatly limit gaming options; by eliminating the potential for ugly historical realities, some of the more interesting historical conflicts are also impossible. A Western without direct human interaction with Native Americans, for example, is denied a number of adventure possibilities.

- **Downplay it.** Like so many aspects of gaming, a little "realistic" historical attitude can go a long way. Thus a typical Victorian-era English aristocrat might express disdain for all things "not British," or a Cliffhangers pilot might make an off-hand sexist comment like, "The Amazon is a dangerous place for a woman . . ." Much like ignoring it, downplaying the ugly side of history can maintain a level of realism without directly confronting the uncomfortable aspects.
- **Heroes are made of sterner stuff . . .** In slightly less realistic games, it could just be assumed that heroes don't judge a person by gender or color of skin. Again, this is pretty easy to justify; most campaign PCs tend to be exceptional people in the first place, so adding one more layer of distance between them and the bulk of humanity isn't very difficult.

When using this option, players can either come up with their own reason *why* they're different in their beliefs ("I've looked at all people equally ever since I was rescued by that Japanese schoolgirl in '17 . . ."), or it could just be part of what they are. In this way the characters can be heroic and identifiable by modern players, while still existing in a historical world.

(As an aside, in my experience this seems to be the solution games with thinner walls between player and character interactions gravitate towards. The GM can occasionally make reference to society's racist and sexist attitudes, and the heroes shake their heads, sigh, and save the world.)

- **Get rid of it, with justification.** Many recent games have gone to considerable lengths to justify the lessening or elimination of racist and sexist attitudes. *Deadlands* posits out that long-held narrow-minded views have needed to be rethought in recent years, since the extended Civil War has resulted in the deaths of many young white men; this has created a vacuum that enabled people of other ethnic groups and women to fill many jobs and roles that were previously closed. *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, on the other hand, simply points out that it's not wise to judge vampires by their appearance; you never know when that person whose background or gender you're degrading is a thousand years old, and more powerful than you'll ever realize . . .

This can be a good option, but usually requires an alternate reality of some sort (like a decade-long Civil War, vampires, or both). Even so, clever players can use this technique on an individual scale in many campaigns. For example, if the PC is one of the three best code-breakers in America in a World War II campaign, it doesn't need to matter as much that she's a woman; if codes need to be broken, she'll need to be along . . . no matter how dangerous or inappropriate the situation is for a member of the "fairer sex."

- **Get rid of it, without justification.** Depending on the campaign, it can be entirely possible to simply sweep the ugly bits of history under the rug. Any game that has other historical anachronisms -- like the *Hercules*, *Xena* and *Jack of All Trades* television series -- really has no problem adding one more. ("Yes, I'm a scantily clad woman roaming the countryside with my female companion, fighting evil. Any questions?" "Um . . . Aren't you cold?") While not the most realistic option, it's certainly a strong possibility in many games. And it's possible to introduce characters (either PCs or NPCs) who *do* have racist or sexist attitudes; in this way players can explore that aspect of roleplaying in a historical game, without needing to worry that it will be an omnipresent theme of the campaign.
- **Roleplay it.** This option is both the most obvious and yet arguably the most difficult. At least, I like to believe that it's difficult for most gamers today to, say, put themselves in the shoes of someone who hates all non-whites, or someone who thinks women are lesser creations of God and thus destined subservient to men.

But if everyone is comfortable (or at least up to the challenge) then it may be possible to enhance the feel of the historical universe. After all, history isn't just timelines and costumes and different weapon tables; it's the mindset of an era . . . its hope, dreams, fears, and "character." Sometimes it's positive, like the blind optimism that "anything is possible" of the Victorian era; sometimes it's negative, like the "white man's burden" mindset of the same time.

If a group *is* willing to pursue this option, it's probably wise to remember that -- even with the darkest emotions and attitudes of other eras -- such facets weren't constant so much as pervasive. Thus the Middle Ages may have relegated women to second-class status, but the church didn't issue weekly "women are evil" sermons or the like; rather there was a woman-controlling subtext ("The sermon this week is on the strength of the family . . ."), with more strong-armed techniques -- like guilt, condemnation, and even ostracism (or worse) -- reserved for women who act outside the social norm. As such, characters in this kind of environment needn't be slur-spewing woman-beating hate-mongers; rather, they can generally hold their opinions quietly until confronted with something that actively challenges their beliefs. Even then, *how* someone reacts in those circumstances can be varied.

Regardless of what method a historical game is going to use to deal with history's ugly sides, everyone should be using the same (or similar) option. If the GM is going to gloss over those parts, while another player is planning on playing a modern-minded character, while another wants to explore those darker elements actively, there will be conflict. In

particular, the "baseline" opinion of society should be made explicitly clear; in a game where everyone is more enlightened and modern-thinking, Intolerance may be a disadvantage. On the other hand, in a game where everyone is assumed to have Intolerance, being Tolerant may actually be an advantage (or not . . . the social stigma of those beliefs may be enough to off-set any benefits such beliefs could bestow).

This is especially important if you're *playing* a member of a socially restricted group. If your character is a female inventor in sixteenth-century France, then it's good to know before play starts how much society is going to hate you, seek to keep you from doing what you do, burn you at the stake, and so on.

Historical, alternate history, and history-based games are some of the most common campaigns around. Unfortunately, history contains a lot of parts that can be uncomfortable, awkward, and just plain ugly. Fortunately, historical games *are* games first and foremost; as long as everyone agrees on the rules, everyone should have fun.

* * *

As a totally chaotic aside, I feel like there should be a Random Thought Table drinking game at some point. Y'know, if I mention how important communication between GM and players is, take one swig. Mention the **Torg** story, take two drinks. Phrase an obvious authorial opinion in a detached fashion to fabricate a sense of impartiality -- "Some players may dislike GMs who hurl putrid greasy chicken bones at their hair" -- take three drinks.

(Whether reader or writer should be doing the drinking here, I'm not certain . . . But I digress.)

--*Steven Marsh*

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*Last week's answer: **Clanbook: Malkavian** (first edition), p. 64.*

(Five stars) "If you have the 18"x24" Rorschach blot, tape it to the wall somewhere nearby. . . Before the game, take aside the player who will play the mute Marcell Pfeiff. Pfeiff begins the adventure wearing the face of the dead guard and with the dead guard's severed tongue in his mouth. . . The player should also, when given the cue, speak in a commanding voice the following words: 'To know me is to join me. I am the Opener of the Way.'"

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Roadblock

Four 20th Century Armored Cars for GURPS

by Onno Meyer & Hans-Christian Vortisch

Jake settled into the unfamiliar driver's seat. The car was supposed to be a Rolls-Royce, but it wasn't like any Rolls he had seen before. At least the armor should help with any fences that got in the way. Behind him, the others tried to figure out how to load the machine gun.

Sergeant Young took a deep breath and approached the Krauts. The checkpoint didn't look very professional, but if he turned around now, they had to wonder why. He forced his hands to stay away from his stiletto; it wouldn't help against a 20mm autocannon anyway.

* * *

*Lieutenant Holston eased his boat towards the center of the river. There were two BTR-60s on the embankment, covering the road. With surprise, they should be able to take both of them out . . . but a firefight on the way *in* was no good start for a commando raid.*

When Hoffstetter and his team arrived, the M.P. still held both ends of the bridge. But that wouldn't last. While he was reporting to the lieutenant in charge, one of the ASVs fired a long burst into the tree line. The engineers started to prepare the blocks of C4 and the fuses.

Light armor can make an exciting encounter in many action-oriented games. Here comes a selection of historical vehicles that covers most of the 20th-century, from early TL6 to late TL7. For each of the four vehicles, there is a historical introduction to help the gamemaster place it in a campaign, a detailed description and finally a reasonably realistic representation using **GURPS Vehicles**.

This article works well with the earlier article ["Heavy Metal -- Four 20th Century Tanks for GURPS."](#)

Rolls-Royce Pattern 14, Great Britain, 1914 (TL6)

*"A Rolls in the desert was above rubies."
-- Colonel T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom**

History: The idea to fit a car with armor and armaments pre-dates the twentieth century. When the Germans overran Belgium in 1914, a Royal Naval Air Service squadron stationed there with a motley assembly of aircraft, cars, and riflemen armored some of their vehicles with boiler-plate. These proved to be effective, and by late 1914, the Royal Naval Armoured Car Division had been formed. The mainstay of the division was the Rolls-Royce Pattern 14, but it also included armored cars and trucks of other makes, as well as machine guns mounted on motorcycles. The Pattern 14 was mass-produced based on a commercial touring car chassis.

The RNAC Division used these vehicles in combat on the Western Front, in North Africa, South West Africa, and East Africa. In 1915 the division was disbanded and, except for one squadron, its assets transferred to the British Army Motor Machine Gun Corps (later the Tank Corps). Units of the corps operated in Ireland, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Persia, and India (all then part of the British Empire). During WWI, armored cars were typically organized in four-car batteries. One famous unit was Lawrence's Hedjaz Armoured Car Section.

Many Pattern 14 armored cars were upgraded in 1920 by fitting improved wheels and tires. The Rolls-Royce Pattern 20 and other designs such as the Lanchester Mk I or Peugeot Mle 1918 were very similar.

Description: The vehicle used the chassis of the commercial Rolls-Royce 40/50 *Silver Ghost*, unmodified except for the stronger springs. Mounted on the chassis was the Admiralty-pattern armored hull, which featured 9mm thick plates all around (a weak spot being the wooden floor). This hull resembled a pickup, with an armored cab and open cargo bed. A turret was mounted on the cab roof. The entire vehicle was painted either olive green, sand, or in a four-color camouflage pattern. Interestingly, vehicles under Navy command had a crew of three, while those of the Army were manned by four men (which reduced crew comfort to a minimum). The driver sat on the right side on the floor, with the other crew members crouching behind him, with their upper bodies in the turret. There were no seats except for the driver's cockpit-type cushion seat on the floor. The rest of the crew often preferred riding in the cargo bed in safe areas. Access to the crew compartment was provided by a twin-door in the rear, leading onto the bed. The sides of the bed were lined with wooden cargo compartments (4.5 cf on each side), holding tools and doubling as seats. Tiny vision slits were used in combat, but in safe areas a front shutter could be folded up to allow for better vision. Vehicles operating in the desert often had the turret roof removed, for better air circulation. Running boards along the sides were used for further stowage; in the desert this was typically a 5-gallon fuel drum and a 40-gallon water tank.

The manually-traversed turret mounted the armament, which consisted of a 7.7x56mmR (.303 SAA) Vickers Mk I water-cooled medium machine gun (pp. HT117, W96). It fed from a 250-round web belt. Additional ammunition was stowed in cans in the fighting compartment.

Royal Navy crews were armed with the 11.5x23mm (.455 Webley Auto) Webley & Scott Mk I pistol (use Colt Government, p. HT108, W94), while British Army personnel were issued the 11.5x19mmR (.455 SAA) Webley Mk VI revolver (p. HT110, W94). Both used the 7.7x56mmR (.303 SAA) Enfield SMLE Mk III bolt-action rifle (p. HT114). A 7.7x56mmR (.303 SAA) BSA-Lewis Mk I light machine gun (p. HT118, W96) and a 38mm Very Mk I flare pistol were also carried in the car for dismounted use. A small opening in either side of the body could be used as gun port for these hand-held weapons.

The commercial Rolls-Royce gasoline engine was mounted in the front. It had a battery-powered ignition trembler coil. The car had three interconnected fuel tanks, a smaller gravity-feed one mounted in the dash (which was rather dangerous for the crew if hit), and two larger ones in the bottom of the cargo bed. Only the rear axle was powered, and off-road performance was limited. Wire-spoked wheels were used, which had thin tires prone to punctures. The rear axle had twin tires. At least two spare wheels were always carried, mounted on the sides of the cab.

Subassemblies: Standard wheels (Wh, six wheels). Turret (Tu, full rotation, on BoT).

Propulsion: 37 kW wheeled drivetrain (Bo, HP 10).

Armaments: 7.7mm Vickers Mk I Machine Gun (TuF, HP 4). 250 x 7.7mm Solid rounds (Tu, HP 1). 2,750 x 7.7mm Solid rounds (Bo, HP 6).

Instruments: Signal flags (Bo). Navigation instruments (Bo, HP 4).

Controls: Mechanical. *Crew Stations:* "Driver" operates maneuver controls, navigation instruments, "Gunner" operates Machine Gun, "Loader" and "Second Loader" load Machine Gun, all from cramped crew stations (Bo, HP 50 each).

Crew: "Driver", "Gunner", "Loader", optionally "Second Loader". *Occupancy:* Short. *Passengers:* Four.

Accommodations: Four exposed, cramped seats (Bo, HP 30 each).

Power and Fuel: 37 kW standard gasoline engine (Bo, uses 2.1 gph G, HP 18) powers drivetrain. 1,600 kWh lead-acid battery (Bo, HP 2), recharged by engine. Two 12 gallon tanks (Bo, fire +1, HP 9 each) and one 7.2 gallon tank (Bo, fire +2, HP 6). 31.2 gallons of gasoline (fire on 12/13) last for 14 hours 51 minutes.

Access, Cargo and Empty Space: 7.32 cf access space (Bo), 9 cf cargo space (Bo), 25.06 cf empty space (Bo), 24.43 cf empty space (Tu).

Volume: Bo 180 cf, Wh 18 cf, Tu 25 cf.

Area: Bo 200 sf, Wh 50 sf, Tu 60 sf, total area 310 sf.

Structure: Light frame.

Hit Points: Bo 150, Wh 13 each, Tu 45.

Special Structural Options: Heavy compartmentalization in Bo.

Body Armor: BoF, BoB, BoR, BoL PD 4, DR 25 standard metal armor. BoT PD 3, DR 15 standard metal armor. BoU

PD 2, DR 3 standard wooden armor.

Wheel Armor: PD 3, DR 5 standard metal armor.

Turret Armor: TuF, TuB, TuR, TuL PD 4, DR 25 standard metal armor. TuT PD 3, DR 15 standard metal armor.

Surface Features: Camouflage paint job. Hitch.

Vision: Poor.

Details: Door in rear onto flatbed, headlights and running lights, no keys.

Statistics: Empty weight 5,369.8 lbs. Fuel 187.2 lbs. Ammo 168 lbs. Crew and cargo 980 lbs. Loaded weight 6,705 lbs. (3.35 tons). Volume 223 cf, size modifier +3. Price \$10,928.40. HT 9.

Ground Performance: Speed 55 mph. gAccel 3 mph/s. gDecel 10 mph/s. gMR 0.75. gSR 4. High GP, off-road speed 1/6.

Minor Bugs: Low mileage. The fuel consumption has been increased. Vulnerable fuel tank. The fire number of one tank has been increased.

Weserhütte LePzSpähw (2cm) SdKfz 222, Germany, 1935

(TL6/7)

"An SdKfz 222,' Carlos says, impressively. 'We, like, liberated it from a collector over in Reno.'"

-- Aaron Allston, *Hell On Wheels*

History: The *Leichter Panzer-Spähwagen (2cm)* (light armored reconnaissance vehicle with 20mm gun) SdKfz 222 and its minor variants were designed by the Eisenwerke Weserhütte for the *Wehrmacht* of Nazi Germany. It was intended for reconnaissance in armored divisions, but also used for rear-area patrols and security. More than 2,100 vehicles in this series (including the SdKfz 221 and SdKfz 223) were built by a number of contractors between 1935-1942. The SdKfz 222 was a successful design which was better protected and armed than contemporary vehicles of the Allies, but -- like many German developments -- too expensive and complicated for wartime production.

Twelve of these vehicles were exported to China in 1935. These differed in mounting a 7.92x57mm Rheinmetall-Dreyse MG13 machine gun, but were otherwise identical. Bulgaria received 13 standard vehicles in the 1940s.

An armored reconnaissance platoon consisted of four SdKfz 222 and two SdKfz 223, the latter being very similar, but fitted with extensive radio equipment and armed only with a 7.92x57mm Rheinmetall MG34.

Description: The SdKfz 222 was a nimble, 16-foot long, 4-wheeled armored car with all-wheel drive and all-wheel steering. The hull was made of ballistic steel and provided protection from small arms fire and shell splinters (maximum thickness of 14.5mm to the front). It was well-sloped on all sides. There was a door in either side of the lower hull for crew access. The turret top was open, protected only by a double hatch made of mesh wire and a canvas cover against the elements. Most were painted in the standard Army gray, but those of the *Afrika-Korps* received a sand finish.

There were three crew positions, one in the hull and two in the turret. The driver was seated in the center of the hull front. He had three small, glassless windows with armored shutters. The commander/loader sat on the left side in the turret. To his right in the turret was the station of the gunner. Both had vision slits.

The main armament was a 20x138mmB Rheinmetall KwK30 autocannon with L55 barrel (p. W130); from about 1940 this was replaced with a 20x138mmB Mauser KwK38, which was operationally identical, but had a higher cyclic rate (RoF 8*). The ammunition was loaded in 10-round magazines, 18 of which were stowed in a rack near the commander's station. Normally,

both API and SAPHE rounds were carried. APCR, available from 1940, was seldom carried and removed from service in 1944 to conserve tungsten. The gun had a maximum elevation of +80°, but the double hatch had to be open in order to elevate the gun more than +20°. Traverse of the turret was of the manual type. A 7.92x57mm Rheinmetall MG34 machine gun (p. HT119, W97, W130) was installed coaxially with the cannon, on the right side. It fed from a 150-

round belt in a belt pouch. The vehicle carried solid or AP rounds, both mixed with tracers.

The crew had three 9x19mm Luger P08 (pp. HT108, W94) or [Walther P38](#) pistols (p. W94) with two magazines each, a single 9x19mm ERMA MP38 or MP40 submachine gun (pp. HT116, W96) with six magazines, a 26.5x103mmR Walther LP28 flare pistol, and six *Stielhandgranaten* (pp. HT117, W98) between them.

The rear-mounted Horch engine originally delivered 56 kW. This was upgraded several times over the course of the production period; by late 1940, a 67 kW engine was installed. Both the front and rear axles were steerable, which made the vehicle highly maneuverable but also required a high degree of maintenance.

Pioneer and vehicular repair and maintenance tools were carried in boxes and racks on the vehicle's outside. A spare wheel and tire were attached to the right hull side. A rack on the hull front held four 5.3-gallon fuel cans.

Subassemblies and Body Features: Off-road wheels (Wh, four wheels). Turret (Tu, full rotation, on BoT). 30 degree slope on BoF, BoB, BoR, BoL, TuF, TuB, TuR, TuL.

Propulsion: 56 kW all-wheel drivetrain (Bo, HP 17).

Armaments: 20mm KwK30 Autocannon (TuF, HP 11). Universal mount for KwK30 (Tu, HP 7). 10 x 20mm SAPHE rounds (Tu, HP 1). 70 x 20mm API rounds (Bo, HP 2). 100 x 20mm SAPHE rounds (Bo, HP 3). 7.92mm MG34 GPMG (TuF, HP 4). Universal mount for MG34 (Tu, HP 2). 150 x 7.92mm AP rounds (Tu, HP 1). 900 x 7.92mm AP rounds (Bo, HP 3).

Instruments and Electronics: Medium communicator (Bo, 10 miles, HP 2, 0.1 kW). Telescope (TuF, x2.5, vision bonus +1/+2, HP 1). Navigation instruments (Bo, HP 4).

Controls: Mechanical. *Crew Stations:* "Driver" operates maneuver controls and navigation instruments, "Commander" operates radio and loads weapons, "Gunner" operates weapons and telescope, all from normal crew stations (Bo, HP 60 each). *Crew:* "Driver", "Commander", "Gunner". *Occupancy:* Short. *Environmental Systems:* Environmental controls for three persons (Bo, HP 5, 0.75 kW).

Power and Fuel: 56 kW standard gasoline engine (Bo, uses 2.52 gph G, HP 23) powers drivetrain. 3,240 kWh lead-acid battery (Bo, HP 4) powers other systems for 64 minutes, recharged by engine. Two 13.2 gallon tanks (Bo, fire +1, HP 10 each). 26.4 gallons of gasoline (fire on 12) last for 10 hours 29 minutes.

Access, Cargo and Empty Space: 11.88 cf access space (Bo), 10 cf cargo space (Bo), 52.2 cf empty space (Bo), 11.01 cf empty space (Tu).

Volume: Bo 300 cf, Wh 60 cf, Tu 25 cf.

Area: Bo 300 sf, Wh 100 sf, Tu 60 sf, total area 460 sf.

Structure: Medium frame.

Hit Points: Bo 450, Wh 75 each, Tu 90.

Special Structural Options: Heavy compartmentalization in Bo. TL7 all-wheel steering.

Body Armor: BoF PD 5, DR 60 standard metal armor. BoB PD 5, DR 25 standard metal armor. BoR, BoL PD 5, DR 30 standard metal armor. BoT, BoU PD 3, DR 15 standard metal armor.

Wheel Armor: PD 3, DR 5 standard metal armor (tires have PD 2, DR 3).

Turret Armor: TuF, TuB, TuR, TuL PD 5, DR 30 standard metal armor. TuT PD 2, DR 3 open-frame standard metal armor.

Surface Feature: Camouflage paint job. TL7 puncture-resistant tires.

Vision: Poor.

Details: One door in each side, one hatch in turret top, intercoms, headlights and running lights, no keys.

Statistics: Empty weight 9,690.67 lbs. Fuel 158.4 lbs. Ammo 145.2 lbs. Crew and cargo 800 lbs. Loaded weight 10,794.27 lbs. (5.4 tons). Volume 385 cf, size modifier +4. Price \$30,395.44. HT 12.

Ground Performance: Speed 50 mph. gAccel 3 mph/s. gDecel 10 mph/s. gMR 1. gSR 4. High GP, off-road speed 1/4.

Minor Bug: Hangar queen. The maintenance interval is 96 hours.

Gorkovskiy Avtozavod BTR-60PB, USSR, 1966 (TL6/7)

"Target BTR, eleven o'clock, twenty-seven hundred!"

-- Tom Clancy, *Red Storm Rising*

History: In 1960, the *Bronetransporter 1960g Plavayushchiy* (armored transport of 1960, amphibious) entered production as the Soviet Army's new wheeled armored personnel carrier, replacing the obsolete BTR-152. The BTR-60P was soon found to be lacking in armament, and it was also felt that an open-topped vehicle was not survivable enough on the NBC-ravaged battle field, as well as against artillery. The BTR-60PA received top armor, and the BTR-60PAI a turret, but the finalized and most commonly encountered variant became the BTR-60PB, the B standing for *Bashnya* (turret). Adopted in 1965, it was first issued to troops in 1966.

There were a number of variants, including the BTR-60PBK command vehicle, BTR-60PU staff officers' vehicle, several artillery control versions, and the TAB-71 -- a slightly modified vehicle built under license in Romania. In the 1990s, the MTP-2B technical assistance vehicle and ATM-2 disaster assistance vehicle appeared, based on surplus BTR-60s. Of course, it was also the model after which the BTR-70, BTR-80, BTR-90, and BTR-94 were patterned.

A total of 25,000 BTR-60s were made before Soviet production ceased in 1976.

The BTR-60PB was used extensively by Soviet armed forces, including the motorized infantry, naval infantry, KGB troops, and border guards, as well as MVD interior security forces. Six were employed in the KGB *Gruppa Alfa's* assault on the Afghan Taj-Bek Palace (pp. SO21-23). It has also been used by Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cuba (encountered by U.S. Rangers on Grenada in 1983), Djibouti, East Germany, Ethiopia, Finland, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Nicaragua, North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Turkey, Vietnam, USA (for opposing forces training), Yugoslavia, and others.

A Soviet motorized infantry platoon consisted of three BTR-60PBs. A company was made up of three platoons, plus a BTR-60PBK for the company commander and a heavy weapons platoon with two BTR-60PBs carrying three machine gun teams and three antitank missile teams.

It was known as the *kolesniy grob* (wheeled coffin) to Russian soldiers; not only did it look like one, it was also considered less than safe since it was insufficiently protected and difficult to evacuate.

Description: The BTR-60PB was a 25-foot long, eight-wheeled vehicle with a small machine gun turret towards the front. It featured an all-wheel drive, with the two front axles being used for steering. The armor was 7mm thick in most places, and sloped for maximum effect. Nevertheless, it would only protect against small arms and artillery fragments. Like other Soviet vehicles, it was painted olive drab overall. The vehicle had the driver and commander in the front. Both had an armored window, which was protected by a shutter in combat, so that they had to use the three periscopes installed over both stations. These could be fitted with active IR-periscopes. The commander also had a traversable IR-searchlight. Hatches were provided in the roof above their stations. Behind them was the small one-man turret with the gunner's station. Between the turret and the engines in the rear was the passenger compartment. The riflemen sat on benches along the sides and rear of the vehicle. The passenger compartment had two hatches in the roof above the passenger compartment and a very small hatch in either side of the hull, making egress rather difficult. Usually only seven riflemen (plus the commander) were carried for dismounted combat, allowing some stowage of weapons and a semblance of crew comfort . . . but it was not unheard of to squeeze 13 men in.

The main armament installed in the manually-operated turret consisted of a 14.5x114mm Vladimirov KPVT heavy machine gun (p. HT119), which fed from a 200-round belt of AP, incendiary, and tracer rounds. Another 300 rounds were stowed in 50-round cans in the hull. To the right of this was a 7.62x54mmR Kalashnikov PKT coaxial machine gun (p. HT120), feeding from a 250-round belt with a mix of AP and tracers, with additional ammo being stowed in 250-round cans.

There were three gun ports on the right side and two on the left side of the hull. These were to be used by the infantry for suppressive fire on the assault. Opening them breached the NBC-seal, of course. The driver and gunner of a Soviet crew each had a 9x18mm Makarov PM pistol (pp. SO98, C63) with two magazines, while the commander had a 7.62x39mm Kalashnikov AKM assault rifle (p. HT114) with four magazines. The automatic rifleman had a 7.62x39mm Kalashnikov RPK light machine gun (p. HT114) with a 75-round drum and three 40-round magazines. The antitank specialist had a RPG-7V antitank grenade launcher (p. HT122) with five 85mm grenades and a PM

pistol. His assistant had an AKM and four spare rounds for the RPG-7V. Four riflemen had AKM rifles, although one man per platoon was a sniper with a 7.62x54mmR Dragunov SVD sniper rifle (p. SO100) and five magazines. The whole crew also had nine F-1 hand grenades (use Mk II, pp. HT117, W98) between them, which were usually used by the riflemen. Apart from weapons, there was also room for life jackets (p. VE203) for everybody onboard.

The eight wheels had large tires with run-flat inserts and a Central Tire Inflation System, which allowed variations in tire pressure for different ground conditions. The twin GAZ engines were located in the rear hull, separated from the crew compartment by a fire-proof bulkhead.

Steering in water was accomplished by a rudder in the hydrojet assembly and also by turning the front wheels.

Subassemblies and Body Features: Off-road wheels (Wh, eight wheels). Open mount (Om, full rotation, on BoT). Turret (Tu, full rotation, on BoT). 60 degree slope on BoF. 30 degree slope on BoB, BoR, BoL, TuF, TuB, TuR, TuL. *Propulsion:* 134 kW all-wheel drivetrain (Bo, HP 21). 93 kW hydrojet (Bo, 1,116 lbs. aquatic motive thrust, HP 17). *Armaments:* TL6 14.5mm KPVT HMG (TuF, HP 10). 200 x 14.5mm AP rounds (Tu, HP 5). 300 x 14.5mm AP rounds (Bo, HP 6). 7.62mm PKT MG (TuF, HP 3). 250 x 7.62mm AP rounds (Tu, HP 1). 1,750 x 7.62mm AP rounds (Bo, HP 5).

Instruments and Electronics: Medium communicator (Bo, 30 miles, HP 1). IR-Searchlight (OmF, 0.25 miles, HP 1, 0.25 kW). IR-Searchlight (BoF, 0.05 miles, HP 1, 0.05 kW). Telescope (TuF, x2, vision bonus +1/+2, HP 1).

Navigation instruments (Bo, HP 4).

Miscellaneous Equipment: Fire extinguisher system (Bo, HP 13). Bilge pump (Bo, HP 30, 1 kW). Winch (BoF, ST 25, 25 yards, HP 11, 0.125 kW).

Controls: Mechanical. *Crew Stations:* "Driver" operates maneuver controls, 0.05 mile IR-searchlight and fire extinguisher, "Commander" operates radio, 0.25 mile IR-searchlight, navigation instruments and winch, "Gunner" operates weapons and telescope, all from normal crew stations (Bo, HP 60 each). *Crew:* "Driver", "Commander", "Gunner". *Occupancy:* Short. *Passengers:* Seven. *Accommodations:* Seven normal seats (Bo, HP 60 each).

Environmental Systems: NBC kit for 14 persons (Bo, HP 22, 3.5 kW).

Power and Fuel: Two 67 kW standard gasoline engines (Bo, use 2.68 gph G, HP 23 each) power drivetrain. Two 3,672 kW lead-acid batteries (Bo, HP 3 each) power other systems for 25 minutes, recharged by engine. Two 38.3 gallon tanks (Bo, HP 20 each). 76.6 gallons of gasoline (fire on 11) last for 14 hours 17 minutes.

Access, Cargo and Empty Space: 25.08 cf access space (Bo), 10 cf cargo space (Bo), 9.12 cf empty space (Bo), 9.11 cf empty space (Tu).

Volume: Bo 800 cf, Wh 160 cf, Om 0.09 cf, Tu 20 cf.

Area: Bo 600 sf, Wh 200 sf, Om 1.5 sf, Tu 50 sf, structural area 850 sf, total area 851.5 sf.

Structure: Heavy, cheap frame.

Hit Points: Bo 1,800, Wh 150 each, Om 3, Tu 150.

Special Structural Option: Heavy compartmentalization in Bo.

Body Armor: BoF PD 6, DR 35 standard metal armor. BoB PD 5, DR 25 standard metal armor. BoR, BoL PD 5, DR 20 standard metal armor. BoT PD 4, DR 20 standard metal armor. BoU PD 3, DR 15 standard metal armor.

Wheel Armor: PD 3, DR 5 standard metal armor (tires have PD 2, DR 3).

Turret Armor: TuF, TuB, TuR, TuL PD 5, DR 25 standard metal armor. TuT PD 4, DR 20 standard metal armor.

Surface Features: Sealed. Camouflage paint job. Puncture-resistant tires.

Vision: Poor.

Details: Four hatches on body top, two doors in sides (right, left), gun ports, intercoms, headlights and running lights, no keys.

Statistics: Empty weight 20,578.98 lbs. Fuel 359.6 lbs. Ammo 334 lbs. Crew and cargo 2,200 lbs. Loaded weight 23,772.58 lbs. (11.79 tons). Volume 980.09 cf, size modifier +4. Price \$200,461.60. HT 12.

Ground Performance: Speed 55 mph. gAccel 3 mph/s. gDecel 10 mph/s. gMR 0.25. gSR 5. High GP, off-road speed 1/4.

Water Performance: Drag 827. Top water speed 7 mph. wAccel 0.9 mph/s. wDecel 10 mph/s. wMR 0.25. wSR 4. Draft 1.9 feet.

Textron M1117 Guardian ASV, USA, 2000

(TL7)

History: In 1962, Cadillac Gage started development of their V-100 *Commando* 4x4 amphibious armored car for low-intensity operations. This became one of the most successful wheeled armored vehicles, and sold in large quantities . . . mostly to security forces. It was a versatile vehicle with dozens of factory options, including many different turrets and armaments. Slight differences in vehicle size and automotive improvements led to changes in designation, the latest variant being the V-150ST. With a one-man turret and improved armor, this was adopted as the M1117 *Guardian* Armored Security Vehicle (ASV) by the U.S. military in 1999, entering service in 2000. The producer had been re-named Textron Marine and Land Systems in 1994.

The U.S. Army Military Police ordered 94 M1117 ASVs, while more than 4,000 vehicles had been made of other variants. Each M.P. platoon had one squad of three vehicles, two carrying three men and one four (the fourth being the squad leader). The rest of the platoon used armored AM General M1114 HMMWV vehicles. M1117 *Guardians* were first deployed with the 18th M.P. Brigade to Kosovo in late 2000.

Without the turret and less heavily protected, it was a typical security vehicle used all over the world. Smaller armies sometimes had similar models as scout vehicles or even as a tank substitute, with a medium-caliber gun. Variants included the unarmed V-100 (adopted by the Los Angeles Police Department), the V-100 armed with twin 7.62x63mm (.30-06) Colt-Browning M37 machine guns (used as M706 by the U.S. Army M.P. in Vietnam), the V-150 armed with a 90x370mmR Cockerill Mk 3 light tank gun (adopted by the Malaysian army), and the V-150ST armed with a water cannon (adopted by the Mexican military police), plus many more. The basic design of the vehicle was closely copied in Mexico and Portugal, and also by Arrowpointe in the USA.

Description: The M1117 had an angular hull made from 6.35mm welded high-hardness steel. German-designed modular ceramic armor plates were adapted for increased protection, and a Kevlar spall liner added inside, giving protection against small arms and artillery shell splinters. It was finished in the standard NATO brown/green/black camouflage pattern. The driver sat on the left side of the front, with a hatch in the roof above him. The commander sat to his right, also with a hatch. Two small bulletproof windows to the front and one on each side provided reasonably good vision. The driver had a night vision periscope. To the rear of their seats was a two-part door in either side of the hull, which allowed for easy access. Each door was fitted with a vision block and a gun port for a small arm. Over the doors, slightly off-set to the right, was the one-man turret. The gunner had seven vision periscopes to all sides and a combined image-intensifier/telescope as targeting sight. There was a fourth seat, which was only occupied in a third of all vehicles, for the squad leader. Behind the crew was the ammunition stowage and a bulkhead to the engine compartment. A third door was provided in the rear of the hull, to the right of the engine. A passageway led from the door to the crew compartment.

The main gun in the turret was a 40x53mmSR General Dynamics MK19 MOD 3 automatic grenade launcher (p. HT121), feeding from a 100-round belt of HEDP grenades. Further 500 rounds were carried in 50-round cans in the hull. To the right of this weapon was a coaxial 12.7x99mm (.50 Browning) General Dynamics-Browning M2QCB heavy machine gun (p. HT119), feeding from a 200-round belt. More ammunition was stored in 100-round cans in the hull. The standard ammo load was AP mixed with tracer and incendiary types. Solid and APS ammo was available as alternative. Coaxial with the M2QCB was a 500,000 candela spotlight.

Each military policeman was armed with a 9x19mm Beretta M9 pistol (Model 92FS, pp. HT108, C63) with two magazines, a 5.56x45mm Colt M16A2 assault rifle (pp. C64, HT116) with six magazines and two M67 hand grenades (p. B206). The guns could be deployed through the gun ports in the doors.

The four wheels had large tires with run-flat inserts and a Central Tire Inflation System. The Cummins diesel engine was located in the left rear of the hull, together with the fuel tank and batteries, separated from the crew compartment by a fire wall. Installed in the front, forward of the commander's position, was the winch with 53-yard cable, which could be used for self-recovery. Note that, unlike its predecessors, the M1117 was not amphibious.

Subassemblies and Body Features: Off-road wheels (Wh, four wheels). Open mount (Om1, on TuT). Two open mounts (Om2-Om3, on TuB). Turret (Tu, full rotation, on BoT). 30 degree slope on BoF, BoB, BoR, BoL. 60 degree slope on TuF.

Propulsion: 194 kW all-wheel drivetrain (Bo, HP 27).

Armaments: 40mm MK19 MOD 3 AGL (TuF, HP 8). 100 x 40mm HEDP rounds (Tu, HP 6). 500 x 40mm HEDP rounds (Bo, HP 18). 12.7mm M2QCB HMG (TuF, HP 8). 200 x 12.7mm AP rounds (Tu, HP 3). 600 x 12.7mm AP rounds (Bo, HP 6). Two 66mm M257 Decoy Dischargers (one each Om2F, Om3F, HP 3 each). 8 x 66mm CHEM (Hot Smoke) rounds (four each Om2, Om3, HP 1 each). 8 x 66mm CHEM (Hot Smoke) rounds (Bo, HP 2).

Instruments and Electronics: Medium communicator with scrambler (Bo, 30 miles, HP 1). Searchlight (Om1F, 1 mile, HP 2, 1 kW). Telescope (TuF, x7, vision bonus +3/+5, HP 2). Two light amplifiers (BoF, TuF, HP 1 each). Navigation instruments (Bo, HP 4). Military GPS (Tu1, HP 1).

Miscellaneous Equipment: Full fire suppression system (Bo, HP 16). Bilge pump (Bo, HP 30, 1 kW). Winch (BoF, ST 53, 53 yards, HP 19, 0.265 kW).

Controls: Mechanical. *Crew Stations:* "Driver" operates maneuver controls and one light amplifier, "Commander" operates radio, navigation instruments, GPS and winch, "Gunner" operates AGL, HMG, decoy dischargers, searchlight, telescope and one light amplifier, all from roomy crew stations (Bo, HP 75 each). *Crew:* "Driver", "Commander", "Gunner". *Occupancy:* Short. *Passengers:* One. *Accommodations:* One roomy seat (Bo, HP 75).

Environmental Systems: NBC kit for four persons (Bo, HP 10, 1 kW).

Power and Fuel: 194 kW turbocharged standard diesel engine (Bo, uses 6.79 gph D, HP 50) powers drivetrain. Four 4,320 kW lead-acid batteries (Bo, HP 4 each) power other systems for 88 minutes, recharged by engine. 70 gallon tank (Bo, HP 30). 70 gallons of diesel (fire on 9) last for 10 hours 18 minutes.

Access, Cargo and Empty Space: 32.44 cf access space (Bo), 20 cf cargo space (Bo), 96.08 cf empty space (Bo), 11.54 cf empty space (Tu).

Volume: Bo 600 cf, Wh 120 cf, Om1 0.2 cf, Om2-Om3 0.41 cf each, Tu 20 cf.

Area: Bo 500 sf, Wh 150 sf, Om1 2.5 sf, Om2-Om3 4 each, Tu 50 sf, structural area 700 sf, total area 710.5 sf.

Structure: Heavy, cheap frame.

Hit Points: Bo 1,500, Wh 225 each, Om1 5, Om2-Om3 8 each, Tu 150.

Special Structural Options: Heavy compartmentalization in Bo. Improved suspension. Improved brakes.

Body Armor: BoF, BoB, BoR, BoL PD 5, DR 75 expensive composite exo-armor over DR 45 expensive metal armor and DR 10 non-rigid armor. BoT, BoU PD 4, DR 30 expensive metal armor and DR 10 non-rigid armor.

Wheel Armor: PD 4, DR 20 expensive armor (tires have PD 2, DR 3).

Turret Armor: TuF PD 6, DR 100 expensive composite exo-armor over DR 60 expensive metal armor and DR 10 non-rigid armor. TuB, TuR, TuL PD 4, DR 50 expensive composite exo-armor over DR 30 expensive metal armor and DR 10 non-rigid armor. TuT PD 4, DR 30 expensive metal armor and DR 10 non-rigid armor.

Surface Features: Sealed. Camouflage paint job. Modest IR-cloaking (-2 to detection). Modest sound baffling (-2 to detection). Puncture-resistant tires. Hitch.

Vision: Poor.

Details: Two hatches on body top, three doors in sides (right, left, back), one hatch on turret top, intercoms, headlights and running lights, no keys.

Statistics: Empty weight 27,587.58 lbs. Fuel 420 lbs. Ammo 803.2 lbs. Crew and cargo 1,200 lbs. Loaded weight 30,010.78 lbs. (15.01 tons). Volume 741.02 cf, size modifier +4. Price \$407,621. HT 12.

Ground Performance: Speed 65 mph. gAccel 3 mph/s. gDecel 15 mph/s. gMR 0.75. gSR 5. High GP, off-road speed 1/4. Fords 5 feet.

GURPS-ification Notes

As usual, there were some problems with the translation of real-world data into the *Vehicles* system. No major new rules were needed this time, but some things should be mentioned.

Real life doesn't follow neat TL boundaries, which is the reason why two vehicles are labeled TL6/7. *Vehicles* makes all-wheel steering TL7, but it was already available in the 1920s. Some tires one might call puncture-resistant were available before 1945 as well.

Vehicles doesn't cover a central tire inflation system, which was subsumed under the effects of off-road wheels, improved suspension, or puncture-resistant tires.

GURPS Mecha introduced exo-armor husks: a removable outer layer of armor plates. This was used in the M1117 ASV, even if it has no explosive bolts to shed it.

There are no small-arms incendiary and tracer rounds in **Vehicles**. Pure AP loads are listed, instead of AP, API, and AP-T.

In **Vehicles**, a crew station is placed either in the turret or the body of the vehicle, neither of which accurately reflects the design of small turrets in armored cars. For these designs, empty space was put into the turrets and the crew into the body. The "empty" space in the turret is actually used by crewmembers if they operate their guns.

GURPS Traveller Ground Forces introduced modest emission cloaking (which was reverse-engineered to create modest IR-cloaking) and modest sound baffling. This was used in the M1117 ASV.

Armored Car Weaponry

Generic versions of some of the weapons are described on p. VE43, but new listings for the specific models are included; the rules in **Vehicles** allow for some adjustments to reflect real numbers. This wasn't always enough, and it is noted where the differences between **Vehicles** and the real world became substantial.

Name	Round	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	RoF	Wt	Cost	WPS	VPS	CPS	Ldrs
Vickers Mk I Machine Gun, 7.7x56mmR (TL6)															
	Solid	Crit.	Cr.	6d+2	20	13	840	3,900	9	24	\$360	0.056	0.00037	\$0.028	0

Rheinmetall KwK30 Autocannon, 20x138mmB (TL6)

	API	Crit.	Cr.	15d(2)	20	13	1,300	5,600	5*	123	\$1,600	0.56	0.0037	\$1.12	0
	APCR	Crit.	Cr.	20d(2)		13	1,300	5,600				0.56	0.0037	\$1.4	
	SAPHE	Crit.	Cr.	15d(0.5)		13	1,300	5,600				0.41	0.0037	\$0.56	
	plus	Exp.*		1d-3[2d]											

NOTE: WPS for the SAPHE round should be 0.56 lbs.

Rheinmetall MG34 Machine Gun, 7.92x57mm Mauser (TL6)

	Solid	Crit.	Cr.	7d	17	13	850	3,900	15*	25	\$380	0.058	0.00039	\$0.029	0
	AP	Crit.	Cr.	7d(2)		13	850	3,900				0.058	0.00039	\$0.087	

KPVT Heavy Machine Gun, 14.5x114mm Degtyarev (TL6)

	AP	Crit.	Cr.	15d(2)	20	16	1,400	6,500	10	113	\$1,600	0.46	0.0031	\$0.69	0
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NOTE: Max should be 8,900 yards.

PKT Machine Gun, 7.62x54mmR Mosin-Nagant (TL7)

	Solid	Crit.	Cr.	7d	17	12	840	3,900	12	19	\$1,400	0.052	0.00035	\$0.11	0
	AP	Crit.	Cr.	7d(2)		12	840	3,900				0.052	0.00035	\$0.33	

NOTE: Wt should be 23 lbs.

General Dynamics MK19 MOD 3 Automatic Grenade Launcher, 40x53mmSR NATO (TL7)

	HEDP	Crit.	Exp.*	3d(5)[4d]	20	10	320	2,500	6*	77	\$5,800	0.96	0.0096	\$8.7	0
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NOTES: 1/2D should be 1,500 yards. Damage should be 5d(10) plus 1d+1 [3d]. WPS should be 0.75 lbs.

General Dynamics-Browning M2QCB Heavy Machine Gun, 12.7x99mm Browning (TL7)

	Solid	Crit.	Cr.	13d	20	16	1,200	6,500	8*	72	\$5,400	0.25	0.0017	\$0.5	0
	AP	Crit.	Cr.	13d(2)		16	1,200	6,500				0.25	0.0017	\$1.5	
	APS	Crit.	Cr.	17d(2)		16	1,800	8,100				0.17	0.0017	\$2.5	

NOTE: Wt should be 82 lbs.

Tracor M257 Decoy Discharger, 66mm (TL7)

	CHEM (Smoke)	Crit.	Spcl.	16 yards	17	5	90	1,100	4:4	17	\$1,600	1.7	0.017	\$11	
	CHEM (Hot)	Crit.	Spcl.	16 yards		5	90	1,100				1.7	0.017	\$22	

Selected Reading

English-Language Books

- Crow's *Armoured Fighting Vehicles of World War One* (1998) has a detailed chapter devoted to early armored cars.
- *Jane's Armour & Artillery 2000-2001* (2000) should be the primary source for info on the BTR-60PB and M1117 ASV, or indeed any modern vehicle of this type.
- Schneider's *Tanks of the World* (2001) is also very useful, including complete specifications and illustrations in an affordable package.
- *Soviet/Russian Armor and Artillery Design Practices 1945 to Present* (1999) by Hull/Markov/Zaloga is currently the standard reference work on Russian armored vehicles.

Game Sources

- The Rolls-Royce is featured in the *Call of Cthulhu* adventure "Armored Angels" (*Fearful Passages*, 1992).
- The unofficial *Car Wars* solo adventure *Hell on Wheels* (1984) has the SdKfz 222 as one of its main attractions, including a game counter.
- The *Soviet Combat Vehicle Handbook* (1990) for *Twilight: 2000* has entries on the BTR-60PB and variants.
- *The Morrow Project* (1984) features various versions of early Cadillac Gage V-150 armored cars, including interior views.

Web Sites

- ["Rolls-Royce Armoured Cars"](#) for an account by an English driver in Iraq in the mid-1930s.
- ["Vehicles of the Wehrmacht 1939-1945"](#) has some good pictures of the SdKfz 222.
- ["BTR-60 APC"](#) on the FAS military analysis pages.
- ["M1117 ASV"](#) at Textron, the manufacturer's own site.
- ["M1117 ASV"](#) on the FAS military analysis pages.

Hunting The Griffins

Hunting Infiltrators In The Bulge And Elsewhere

by Michele Armellini

Every roleplayer having a taste for wartime adventures also tends to prefer special operations, where his character can be an independent-minded, highly skilled commando. This one-shot Adventure Pizza, however, will present players with an unusual flavor: the underdog hunting the *Übermensch*.

The Historical Recipe

The history of the battle of the Bulge is known, and Operation Greif (Griffin) received an extensive treatment in books and films¹. This operation was carried out by small German units from SS-Ostufaf. (Lt.Col.) Otto Skorzeny's Panzerbrigade 150, outfitted with American uniforms, equipments, and dogtags, and capable of speaking passable English². These units slipped beyond the lines right after the initial attacks, and made the American rear areas insecure. Some of them were just out to wreak general havoc, others had specific reconnaissance tasks or were to secure key objectives (like bridges over the Meuse). The commandos travelled on captured 2½-ton trucks or jeeps, while the actually armored part of the Brigade had ordinary German armor but also some captured Shermans, and even a few Panthers "disguised" as American M-10 TDs! A third element of the operation was a paratroop.

Apparently, Hitler had confidence in this plan, while German commanders in the field did not expect much, with the possible exception of the officer Skorzeny's task should have supported most, Jochen Peiper³. The commandos achieved little, from a practical point of view, even though at times whole regiments were misdirected by their tricks. Also, they were quite easily identified when challenged. It's easy to suspect that some of them just tried to stay out of harm's way, waiting for friendlies to catch up⁴, which is understandable when considering that by their disguise they forfeited the protection of the Geneva Convention.

However, they were successful in one thing: creating confusion, suspicion and chaos; as the word spread around that a G.I. uniform was no guarantee, American soldiers spent a great deal of time checking each other⁵. Everybody knows that, rather than relying on passwords and documents, M.P.s would ask questions dealing with baseball results, Presidents' names, and other background details that a true American would know.

Overall, Operation Greif wasn't a success. But for a few days, every smiling guy you met on those roads, wearing an uniform much like your own, and speaking your own language, could well be a treacherous enemy, either bent on his devilish plans if he fooled you, or ready to spray you with SMG fire if he didn't . . . a stimulating RPG setting.

Starters

The GM can take the ingredients for the starters straight out of the template chapter of *GURPS WWII*. One of the characters is a seasoned Military Police Corporal (see below), who should go to the most experienced player, while the GM (or players) may choose the others.

It's December 17th. All the PCs are withdrawing in a hurry over the snow-covered country roads, somewhere west of the Our river. A couple of them have been separated from their units, others are with their squad/platoon, on trucks or jeeps. For extra detail, the GM (or players) can concoct hard-luck stories for each of them; the common ingredient is that the Germans' surprise attacks either outflanked or overran the heroes' units. Most of them will be from the 28th "Keystone" (or "Bloody Bucket") Division, and of these, most will be from Pennsylvania.

As the ragbag column reaches a crossroads, they are stopped at a M.P. checkpoint. The M.P. watchdogs seem to be growing impatient with the men of the first 2½-ton truck in the makeshift convoy (see p. W107). Suddenly, the unmistakable noise of incoming rockets is heard. A single explosion throws up blackened snow, not far from the crossroads. Those who fail a roll against Soldier+2 might remain aboard . . . but the others will scramble to the muddy ditch or other cover. As they do so, the soldiers see that, inconceivably, the crew of the first truck at the checkpoint level their guns and fire at the M.P.s! There is a short outburst of fire at the crossroads as the truck sprints away; then, the deafening fire from a Nebelwerfer battery arrives.

When the debris settles, only the heroes are alive and well.

Main Course

The PCs can now rally. The M.P. Corporal is the only survivor of his detachment, and he'll relay to the others that the captain in that truck had a strange accent. Since the players will know the background, they won't take long to understand what happened.

These survivors have to decide what to do. A roll against Tactics+2 should help them prioritize their choices:

- Warning the nearest HQ about these infiltrators is the top priority, and should be implemented in any case;
- Retreating further West is sensible;
- Pursuing those bloody Krauts is possible and truly gung-ho;
- Setting up an ambush or roadblock is unhealthy but, historically, a brave choice that was often made even by such small and makeshift outfits⁶.

It would be a good idea to get a functioning set of wheels. This can be made easy, difficult, or impossible (as most of the vehicles are now wrecks, and maybe the only repairable jeep is bumper-to-bumper with smoking hulks). If the survivors think of it, some of them might rummage through the less-damaged vehicles (and they might find something interesting such as a bazooka or demolition charges), while others take care of the jeep (changing tires and repairing minor problems, roll against Mechanic). For hard realism, the PCs should decide what to do with the wounded. A tough decision, as they can't treat them properly, nor transport them. For a softer version, there are no wounded!

Now the players will largely be in control of what the PCs will do. Given the situation (the military euphemism would be "fluid"), anything could happen. Starting with the options above, let them wander along muddy country roads and through gloomy forests, have small clashes with aggressive recon elements, meet panicked stragglers withdrawing West and sullenly determined soldiers ready to make a stand.

Every time they meet a small group of friendlies, the players should never be sure whether they really *are* friendlies. As the strain of combat and of an impending defeat takes its toll, men nervously fumble with their weapons, say strange things, or just look suspicious. Are they tired Americans or treacherous Germans?

For realism, the GM could devise a way to give the players a clue. Maybe they meet some G.I. that, when questioned, will recall that truck, and the directions those boys asked him for . . . about some bridge to the west. The presence of a M.P. will allow the heroes to set up their own checkpoint if they believe they managed to identify the road the Germans are moving along. This will increase the number of interesting encounters (see the Side Salads options below).

But always, there will be the nagging feeling that the disguised Germans are ahead of the heroes. At crossroads, the posts have no arrows. If the players decide to look for a HQ, the first they find is in shambles: the personnel slaughtered (some of them in cold blood), the radios destroyed. If they decide to set up an ambush, they should survive it and then reel back to the task of hunting the griffins. They'll have a trail of blood and chaos leading up to a key bridge, where the final showdown can take place.

Side Salads

To complement the main course:

- **Mortars Are The True Killers . . .** -- The crossroads clearly came under observed fire (roll against Soldier+2 to realize that). If the PCs spend too much time there (failed roll against Tactics), or their activities are too obvious (failed roll against Stealth), the enemy forward observer could call down some more fire! Of course the soldiers could in turn hunt that FO . . . but if he's this close, so is the front line.
- **. . . But Panzers Are Scarier** -- For a truly frightening encounter, field German armor (p. W103-104 or *Pyramid* article "[Heavy Metal: Four 20th Century Tanks for GURPS](#)"). The PCs will hear them coming, and if they don't fail their rolls (Stealth and/or Camouflage and/or Tactics) they should be able to slip away unnoticed by the clanking monsters -- but on foot, rather than with a highly noticeable vehicle. On the other hand, if they are Overconfident, Impulsive, Fanatical, or just seething for a fight, they might try and use that bazooka.
- **Did You Want To Live Forever?** -- Officers wanting to make a stand will always have uses for more rifles. As the heroes reach yet another crossroads, a Captain orders them to join his delaying action. Time for using those social skills and Fast-Talk their way through. Unless, of course, the players *want* to join in. In this case, the first clash won't be against tanks, but against bunches of mud-covered, weary, wiry youngsters with little training but plenty of grenades.
- **Question Time** -- If the soldiers set up their own checkpoint, the players will probably remember the anecdotes and start asking questions about baseball players and American League results. This can be funny for some time. Then, as nobody trusts anybody, *they* will be asked questions by those they meet. If there are mistakes on both sides, quite a tense situation can arise -- between two all-American teams!
- **Arresting the Colonel** -- No less than Gen. Omar Bradley⁷ was detained for some time (having said that Springfield is the capital of Illinois -- the M.P.s said it was Chicago). Without getting this high, the heroes could be put into a position of trying to arrest some harried and bad-tempered Colonel . . .
- **All Lines Are Busy** -- Just as that Captain wanted to commandeer the party, the heroes might want to find some help. Unfortunately, HQs at first don't listen to them, then answer that there are too many reports like theirs. Similarly, they run into all kinds of SNAFU, while everybody is busy on their own errands. An artillery Lieutenant tries to requisition their vehicle, a M.P. Sergeant orders them to leave the road free while another wants to send them to Bastogne, nobody has fuel, food, or ammo for them, and so on. They'll need Savoir-Faire (Military), Scrounging, maybe Administration, Acting, Intimidation, Diplomacy.
- **And Don't Forget The Weather** -- Environmental conditions shouldn't be underestimated. Freezing temperatures at night, snow and drizzle, muddy, rutted roads, a confusing landscape glimpsed through the fog. Here the skills needed are Survival (Woodlands), Driving, Orienteering, and if the vehicle breaks down, Mechanic (or Hiking!).

Extra Spice?

- The Germans' task is to *secure* a bridge. When the heroes arrive there, not only have they removed the demolition charges prepared by engineers, they have also convinced a small garrison that the bridge must stand, because destroying it would cut off an entire division. So, unwary Americans are now ready to fight side by side with these scoundrels. The German officer speaks very fluent English with a Yankee accent, and he'll accuse the party of being disguised Germans!
- Every PC comes from a different unit. They don't know each other. Obviously this scenario has potential: who says one of the PCs isn't actually *one of them*? The slightest hint will let the GM develop that wonderful enemy-within-paranoia. For a double bluff, a PC could have a German-American background, a family name like Schmidt, possibly something wrong in his papers, and yet be loyal -- but the others won't trust him a lot!

Dessert

The showdown should feature the defeat of at least one infiltrator team. If the PCs catch up with them at the bridge, the GM can prepare a detailed setting beforehand and have all kinds of American ordnance ready (a retreating unit discarded a perfectly functioning [*insert players' preferred toy here*]).

You could also have a final chase along one of those tortuous, muddy roads, littered with bomb craters, abandoned vehicles, slow-moving ambulances, fleeing civilians on foot and carts, unexploded bombs. See pp. VE143-152 (and the sidebar on p. VE151, in particular!), and/or pp. W150-156; also, the chase rules in *GURPS Cops* (p. 84).

Or, especially if the Germans are encamped near to unwary Americans (see the Extra Spice option #1), the PCs might use some of the commando tricks on the commandos! They might ambush, employ sudden, accurate sniper fire, or sneaking up on them at night for bayonet work. This last idea is risky if the commandos are worth their salt.

The heroes could also fail. Failure may mean death; these are one-shot characters, so don't be shy about it. Or, the PCs might blunder so badly they never see the commandos again. In this case, have them wander uselessly through the wilderness for a few days, shot up, half-starved and frost-bitten, pick them up by means of some stern M.P. detail, and return them to their units in shame and under allegations of desertion. The GM may then debrief the players and help them understand their mistakes!

Alternate Menus

While this adventure is designed for a specific setting, the GM can use these ingredients elsewhere, and elsewhere.

First sift out the basic ingredients:

- **The situation:** an overwhelming enemy attack against a force now on the verge of defeat, extreme environmental conditions, and an enemy that uses both conventional threats and a deceitful, mimetic approach
- **The party:** a haphazard bunch of strangers with one cop-like guy
- **The main enemy:** ruthless, treacherous scumbags who have your own uniforms and equipments, speak your own language more or less well, but lack the needed cultural background.

What other settings can the GM use this recipe in?

- **Elsewhere in WWII.** Mistakes and friendly fire (or no fire on foes) were common in the Desert War, where everyone used everyone else's vehicles. LRDG men tended to use Bedouin garb rather than enemy uniforms, but that's a disguise too, and at night their officers would try with language tricks. On the Eastern Front, there is another, less known Skorzeny stunt: a deep-penetration drop (by means of the Condors of KG 200) of four Jagdkommando Gruppen. The officers were ethnic Germans from the Baltic and the soldiers Russian volunteers (ex-POWs and deserters). The mission was a failure, and details are vague -- but that's a plus from a certain point of view! Plus most players have never played the role of NKVD officers.
- **At Lower TLs.** Uniforms are less formalized or non-existent, identification systems primitive, and treachery a favored tradition. Common cultural background isn't necessarily a touchstone, because armies often are actually made up of semi-independent tribal or feudal entities: barons will change sides, and one can't expect a Legionary in the Teutoburger Forest to be able to distinguish between allied and enemy tribes. In a Fantasy setting you may have the ultimate infiltrators: Doppelgänger, weres, shapeshifters, or wizards! In a Martial Arts campaign, Skorzeny is (of course) a master ninja.
- **At TL7 or 8.** GMs should take a look at *GURPS Special Ops*; when there is a high Acting skill level in the templates, and a mention of foreign language courses on pp. SO56-57, that's the opposition (that would be, for instance, the Delta Force or the KGB Special Troops -- bad news for PCs!). The KGB, in particular, was rumored to have standing plans for high-level infiltrations and assassinations at the very core of NATO HQs, hours before the war that never was. These would have required perfect documents and flawless acting; if the PCs are the guards on duty, they'll have a tough task. There are also have a lot of minor, dirty wars to choose from at these TLs.
- **At higher TLs.** Uniforms (including company dress for Cyberpunk settings) are common and identification systems sophisticated -- but so are countermeasures, hacking and forgeries. Chips and interfaces solve both the linguistic and the cultural problems. Android robots, brainwashed drones and trained clones all make for extremely dangerous infiltrators. For an alternate history/time travel campaign (for *GURPS Time Travel*), the commandos might be under a double disguise: they aren't Germans, they're Centrum or Stopwatch agents! And their mission is to kill Ike (so he won't be a President!). The PCs can either be uninformed local inhabitants

(such as M.P.s on duty with SHAEF, and their task will be daunting), or I-Cops or Timepiece agents. Note that in this setting, that battered 2½-ton truck can be a wondrous vehicle and a mobile parachronic conveyor too!

Serving Suggestions

There should be a good mix of characters: at least a grunt rifleman, maybe a rookie Lieutenant, and an engineer would be useful. As to the selection of advantages and disadvantages, bear in mind that, in keeping with the hallowed war film traditions, this should be a smorgasbord -- let the PCs have different motives and contrasting traits. Typically, there could be an idealistic hero wannabe (maybe the Lieutenant), a cautious good-for-nothing, a "kill-the-Krauts" hot head, and some ordinary workmanlike soldiers. Or there could be different, but less clichéd characters. Regardless, having variety will encourage active roleplaying within the group.

If the group does have a Lieutenant or Sergeant, there may be the command issue. The GM should try exploiting it as an additional roleplaying tool, rather than being bound by it; the GM should give the Lieutenant character to the right player. If, nevertheless, he wants to order the other players around, the GM may create a situation where the Lieutenant's inexperience becomes embarrassingly evident, and encourage the Corporal to offer "suggestions."

If it seems the players will need added motivation, one or more of the heroes should have a buddy (all soldiers tended to have a foxhole buddy who'd be exactly a **GURPS** Ally) . . . and he gets killed in the opening scene.

Don't forget the players are likely to grasp what's happening faster than their real counterparts, because of their own "intelligence officer" General Hindsight. While it's possible to enforce rolls against IQ or specific skills if the GM wants to limit that effect, it could also be considered as part of the fun. The GM shouldn't be afraid if one of the players has read all the books about this battle. The ingredients above are designed to be typical in flavor but generic enough to avoid too many details (and the inevitably attached problems). But above all, this is the GM's show; if the history buff says "this isn't realistic!", the GM can counter with, "It's uncommon, but it happened . . . this time." (Or ". . . on this planet." The players can really be thrown off-balance with that! How do they know this *isn't* an alternate Earth?). And since the players (and characters) are likely to never know exactly where they are, the GM doesn't need to worry about accurate geographic details: It's "a crossroads somewhere near St. Vith" or "a hamlet, with no traffic signs, and the grunts garrisoning it can't agree on the name," or "the platoon's jester called it Frozen Meat Ridge, and the name stuck."

The GM should keep things moving. If the heroes are slacking or the players are getting less interested, have everyone make a Hearing roll. Engines and tank tracks in the distance!

A Ready-Made Military Police Corporal

[Total Points: 100]

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 11 [10]; **HT** 12 [20].

[Total: 70].

Advantages: Acute Vision +1 [2]; Fit [5]; Legal Enforcement Powers 10 [10]; Military Rank 1 [5]; Strong Will +2 [8]. [Total: 30].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10]; Duty (on 15 or less) [-15]; Honesty [-10]; Reputation -2 (rear-echelon man and M.P. watchdog, from frontline soldiers) [-5]. [Total: -40].

Skills: Administration-9 [½]; Armoury (small arms)-10 [1]; Brawling-14 [4]; Camouflage-11 [1]; Climbing-11 [1]; Driving (automobile)-12 [2]; First-Aid-10 [½]; Gambling-10 [1]; Guns (pistol)-13* [1]; Guns (rifle)-13* [1]; Hiking-10 [1]; Intimidation-12 [4]; Knife-12 [1]; Law (military law/regulations)-9 [1]; Leadership-9 [½]; Motorcycle-11 [½]; Orienteering-10 [1]; Savoir-Faire (military)-10 [½]; Shortsword/Club-14 [8]; Soldier-12 [4]; Spear-10 [½]; Stealth-11 [1]; Streetwise-11 [2]; Survival (woodlands)-9 [½]; Tactics (M.P.)-9 [1].

Languages: English-11 [0]; French-9 [½].

[Total: 40].

* +1 Bonus due to IQ.

The Legal Enforcement Powers are worth 10 points because they are (in practice) less clearly defined and limited than those of an ordinary policeman. M.P.s did not enjoy a good reputation with front troops. Duty is exacting but not "Extremely Hazardous," as a rule (in this adventure it will be!).

The Corporal still remembers something from his basic training and may have had some combat experience. Note how he's geared towards breaking up an unarmed brawl, and to prevent troubles by sheer intimidation. He's got a smattering of police-like skills, and those suitable for his rank. The character creation chapters of *GURPS WWII* and *GURPS Cops* were used.

Notes

¹ Classic fictional treatment in the film *The Battle of the Bulge*, by Ken Annakin (1965).

² Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*.

³ SS-Obersturmbannführer (Lieutenant-Colonel) Peiper commanded the most famous attacking unit, the SS-Pz.Regt. 1.

⁴ Alex King, *Operation 'Greif' 1945*, in *Wargames Illustrated* #120.

⁵ Ambrose.

⁶ John Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods*.

⁷ Ambrose.

Other Sources Not Listed Above

- Hasso von Manteuffel's essay, in *Entscheidungsschlachten des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, ed. by Jacobsen & Rohwer (for the strategic outlook from the German point of view)
- *GURPS WWII: Hand of Steel* (of course)
- <http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/article.cfm?id=413> (for a reasonably comprehensive bibliography)
- <http://www.ospreypublishing.com/titles/0850457408> (for the list of Osprey titles about this battle)
- http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Military_Affairs/excel.htm (for a brief history of the 28th Infantry Division)
- http://rhino.shf.ac.uk:3001/mr-home/bulge/7-8_cont.html (for a very detailed, on-line history of the battle)
- <http://www.wssob.com/150bripzr.html> (for an OoB of PzBde. 150 -- warning: you might find this site unsavory)
- http://www.go2war2.nl/landmacht/_voertuigen-gepantserd/dui_pzkw-5_panter/varianten.htm (for a look at the "Ersatz M10")

Pyramid Pick

Kingdoms of Kalamar Player's Guide

Published by [Kenzer & Company](#)

Written by Lloyd Brown III, Brian Jelke, David S. Kenzer, Noah Kolman, Don Morgan, Mark Plemmons

272 b&w pages; \$29.95

I admit that the advertisements for the *Player's Guide* had me cracking up. Imagine a company claiming that quality and cross compatibility are assured because the product is an officially licensed *Dungeons & Dragons* book. Even more humorous to me was the "Rulebook IV" on the cover. With those two factors in mind, I already felt doubtful about how useful a campaign specific book would be based on the marketing alone.

Imagine my surprise when I discover that a good chunk of the book is indeed easily compatible with any setting, and that the whole book is a top-notch product. Broken up into twelve chapters with six appendices and an index, the *Player's Guide* is a tour de force on how to write a supplement.

While chapter one, Races, isn't going to be everyone's cup of tea due to it being specific to Kalamar, it does provide some new material as well as variants that have no increase in base levels. For example, if you ever wanted to play a hobgoblin or half-hobgoblin and found the *Slayer's Guide* a bit lacking, this chapter has you covered. The other races of Tellene, like dark elves, deep gnomes, and golden Halflings, are detailed with fewer powers, making them standard characters instead of characters whose base race makes them a higher level. Each race starts off with a brief introduction, a little fiction, personality, physical description, relations, alignment, lands, religion, language, adventurers and racial traits.

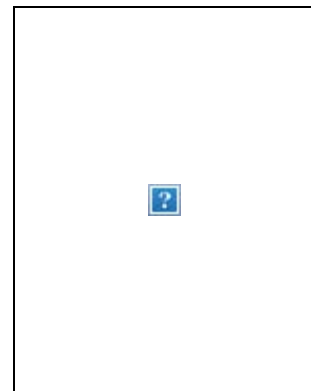
In addition to the non-human races, the human races of Tellene are also covered, providing no stat bonuses or special abilities but rather physical descriptions and roleplaying notes to differentiate humans from one another. The chapter ends with a touch of 1st edition charm, in the form of tables for: random starting ages (based on race and class), aging effects, random height and weight for all races, and a massive list of names for players to scavenge through.

Chapter two, Classes, covers how the standard classes from the core rules, including the *Psionics Handbook*, fit into the setting. (The monk class is accidentally omitted, though.) Also included are deity domains, missing from the core *Kingdoms of Kalamar* book but available as a download from Kenzer & Company's website. It also does something that I personally feel too few supplements do: It introduces new classes. These include:

- **Gladiator:** Warriors who specialize in fighting to appease the masses.
- **Basiran Dancer:** A specialized bard that uses spells and swords to make their point.
- **Brigand:** A combination between rogue and fighter, similar to *Rolemaster's* Rogue profession.
- **Infiltrator:** A rogue variant with some wilderness survival abilities.
- **Shaman:** A divine spellcaster who relies on spirits to cast their spells and power their special abilities.
- **Spellsinger:** A caster who uses song to cast spells, forgoing somatic components but always needing verbal ones.

Chapter Three, Prestige Classes, introduces:

- **Alliance Merchant:** A Prestige Class that specializes in the buying and selling of items with various special abilities to reflect this talent.



- **Bounty Hunter:** Similar to a ranger in hunting skills but with a few special abilities that let him find his foes and bring them back alive.
- **Mariner:** A warrior specialized with skills and abilities that enable her to thrive in water-based environments.
- **Golem Master:** A spellcaster who has an easier time of crafting constructs of all types.
- **Muse:** A bard variant that works to help others craft new art by providing inspiration.
- **Order of the Slayer:** A warrior-based hunter of the undead with limited spell-casting ability.
- **Restorer:** Hobgoblins that seek to restore Kruk-Ma-Kali, a hobgoblin nation.
- **Sentinels of Providence:** Warriors that battle creatures not native to Tellene, like demons, devils, and other Outsiders.
- **Slaver:** Individuals with the ability to control slaves by crushing their spirits.
- **Vessels of Man:** Anti-Clerics whose spellcasting abilities are used to put clerics to the torch.
- **Warlord:** A fighter variant whose special abilities help him lead armies into victory.

Some of these Prestige Classes are definitely meant for NPC or heavy roleplaying use. Others, while tied into specific societies (like the Restorer) have enough goodies that they can be lifted almost whole cloth and put into other settings.

Chapter Four, Skills, provides the GM with new uses for old skills, as well as massive amounts of examples for skills like Craft, Knowledge, and Profession. Perhaps one of the most widely used skills would be Craft: Poisonmaking, which has its own table including the name of the poison, the type, the DC to Create, and the Market Price. New uses for old skills including using the Heal ability to inflict extra damage based off of an increased understanding of how the body functions.

Chapter Five, Feats, provides a massive number of feats for almost any campaign. While a few are similar to region feats from the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting in that they should be taken by only a specific type of character or at first level, many are universal and should be easy to port to any setting. One page breaks down the feats into the different types -- class, general, metamagic -- with the prerequisite. Many of the feats are combat-based, with only a few being of the dreaded +2 bonus to two similar skills.

Chapter Six, Religion, is one very specific to the Kalamar setting, and provides the GM information on the gods of Kalamar. This includes the non-human names for the gods, a table that breaks down each god and provides alignment, weapon, symbol and divine focus. The weapon is important to note for those casting spiritual weapon. Because this is an official product, there is even a god conversion for standard *D&D* and *Forgotten Realms* gods to Kalamar. Commonly worshipped gods by class is also provided, but missing the monk. (Use the Powermaster listing instead.) Most of this chapter is taken up by Canons, the official books that detail the words of the gods. These canons provide the GM with some insight as to what the goals of the church and the god are, and are great for augmenting roleplaying possibilities. Another table breaks up the information by providing the deity, the priesthood name, the church's name, the canon's name, and when the cleric's spells are restored.

Chapter Seven, Equipment, provides new alchemical mixtures, herbal concoctions, poisons, weapons, armor, and information on buying/selling slaves. New armor includes soft leather, cord, wooden breastplates, briandine, lamellar, and shrike (spiked) variants, while new weapons include choppers, dueling swords and leaf blade, along with several different types of arrows and knives. All of this information should be easy to port to another campaign setting and meshes well with established examples.

Chapter Eight, Combat, has fighting schools. These schools don't provide new benefits or abilities as the fighting styles in Mongoose's Quintessential Fighter did, but instead lists the background of the school, commonly taught feats and skills. Information on different infantry schools are also provided, giving the GM a breakdown of feats and the order in which they are acquired to provide some variant among the different countries.

Chapter Nine, Adventuring, gives the GM information on various aspects of the Kalamar world. Native diseases are detailed, including The Blue Death, the Dancing Death, and The Rotting Flesh. Each disease is broken down by where is the disease found, how is it contracted, who carries it, the different stages, and the game effects. Information on advancing through society -- either through the ranks of nobility or through the clergy -- are also provided. The Temple Rank ideas are different because they require specific things, like knowledge skills, spellcasting ability, and the

sacrifice of experience points to reach different levels. Each stage provides different benefits. The chapter ends with some brief information on Sainthood. Unfortunately, you have to be dead to be a saint and there aren't enough examples provided on previous saints to use this information quickly. Worse still (in my mind), I keep comparing this small section to the old *Dragon* article with various abilities for Saints and find this tiny section a little lacking.

Chapter Ten, Magic, starts off with a whole host of abilities for those who can channel their cleric turning energy in other ways. Each church has a different channeling ability which is broken down in a table and detailed in the text. More interesting, though, is the section Divine Right of Kings. Rulers gain special abilities based on their social level in the belief that the gods support the nobility . . . sometimes in exchange for the nobility pledging allegiance to the gods, other times merely at the gods whim.

Chapter Eleven, Spells, provides the GM with famous spellcaster equivalents for the famous D&D Circle of Eight. Bigby becomes Koal, while Evard becomes Alaki, and Mordenkainen becomes Dorama, etc... Another nice touch for being an official product and something not done too often in official products.

The new spells are listed at first by class, level, and alphabetically. Domains are listed with several reprints from *Forgotten Realms* and *Defenders of the Faith*, updated for the Kalamar setting, as well as eight new domains. Information from the *Player's Handbook* is minimal, only including the deity and granted power, while information from the optional books includes the actual spell listing as well. The spells, when listed, are listed in straight alphabetical order and range from granting certain feats like Ambidexterity to standard various damaging spells like Skay's Flaming Bolt, which creates a ray of heat.

Chapter Twelve, Magic Items, has new armor and shield special abilities, as well as new weapon special abilities, and specific items from each field. Items includes the means to make them. Other magic items, like potions, rings, rods, staves, and wondrous items are also included, along with cursed items plus minor and major artifacts.

The Appendices start with references showing that quite a bit of material is reprinted from other sources, including *Defenders of the Faith*, the *Forgotten Realms* book, *Song and Silence*, *Masters of the Wild*, *Sword and Fist*, *Player's Handbook*, and even the official *Dungeons & Dragons* website.

The Glossary is seven pages long and provides the player with almost any information at a glance that he would need.

The Place of Origin Table is broken down by race and location, and actually appears to use a 1d10,000 die for determining your home town.

One of the things I liked best is the Feats Table. The list includes the name, type, source, prerequisite, and description. This is a massive listing, a full thirteen pages, and includes material from all official sources including various issues of *Dragon* magazine and the web site. Even *Oriental Adventures* doesn't escape the listing. There is also a *Kingdoms of Kalamar* character sheet that includes skills from this book and the *Psionics Handbook*.

Another highly useful collection of data is the Spell Planner. This lists each spellcasting class from the prestige classes found in the *Dungeon Masters Guide*, and the *Kingdoms of Kalamar Players' Guide*, to the core classes. This lists includes a check box for memorized, spell level, spell name, type, components, casting time, range, target/effect, duration, saving throw, SR, and source. This 27-page reference includes a list of abbreviations and reference source information to insure that the user should have no problem with it. It might be a little difficult to copy this information with a photocopier, however, so hopefully these will become available as .pdf downloads.

The book ends with a ten page index that makes maneuvering around the book a breeze.

The book is filled with impressive black-and-white illustrations. These help the reader see how the prestige classes might look, how the half-hobgoblins appear, and how different spells look when employed.

I don't like the fact that there is a lot of reprinted information in terms of spells, feats, skills, and domains, but overall it's a rather small percentage. The lack of information on using the monk class in Kalamar is pretty complete -- from using monks to who monks worship -- but hopefully this will be corrected via a web update.

Based on the book's size, its vast amount of non-campaign specific content, and its easy-to-use reference guides for feats and spells, this book should be on every fantasy *d20* player and Game Master's shelf.

--*Joe G. Kushner*

Pyramid Review

Captain Park's Imaginary Polar Expedition



Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

4 board sections, 90 cards, and rule book; \$7.50

In Cheapass Games' latest board game, *Captain Park's Imaginary Polar Expedition*, players are members of the London Professional Gentlemen's Club who are in on a little secret concerning the club's most popular member: Captain Park never actually went to the South Pole. Instead, he simply hid out in London, bought a few strange objects he claimed were from his journeys, then when the time was ripe, returned to the club to claim fame and glory. Rather than turn the old man in as a liar, the players have decided to do the same thing.

Like so many of James Ernest's creations, Captain Park combines simple and challenging game play with a great sense of humor, forming another inexpensive winner.

As is tradition for Cheapass Games, the components are printed in black and white on acceptably sturdy cardstock. The artwork appears to be public domain clip art; no artist is named. Players will need two pawns plus one pawn for each person, counters, and a pad of paper for scoring.

The game board represents a map of London with locations that allow players to pick up cards, play cards, and score those cards. The cards contain Photos, Facts, Anecdotes, and Heroes, all of which players use to build the tale of their false journeys. Each card also has an amusing description that slows the first few games as everyone giggles at their hands. For example, the photograph of the Giant Snake explains, "Do not be confounded by the scale implied in this photograph. This snake was nearly a hundred feet long. It is also common for the pencils of the region to weigh nearly a ton."

On each turn, a player moves his pawn one space on the map. If he is on a Café, he can pick up a new card, which ends his turn. If he is in a location matching a card in his hand, he can play that card in front of himself. By playing a card, he immediately get another turn, meaning players can set up chains of multiple turns to lay down a number of cards. If the player is in the London Professional Gentlemen's Club, they can score all of the cards they have played.

Of course, nothing is ever this easy. The first complication is that players must stay away from the Club long enough to make their tale seem true. Each turn, players take a counter that represents a month of hiding. Once they have seven month counters they are allowed to return to the Club. (The number of months required declines with more players.) Players lose their month counters, however, if they run into Captain Park.

Captain Park has heard about the players' plans to copy his success and is out to spot them in London. A pawn on the board represents Park and it moves from numbered space to numbered space each time any player plays a card. If Park lands on the same space as a player, that player loses all of his counters. Players must think ahead to be sure that Park does not hit them even on other players' turns.

When players enter the Gentlemen's Club, they have to declare the exotic location of their journey, either the South Pole, China, Everest, Africa, or the Amazon. Every card has a score for some or all of these trips. For example, the Anecdote "Tale of Icy Death" is worth points for the South Pole and Everest, but not for the other locations. To compute a score, players choose a location and add up all of the matching scores on the cards in front of them. There are bonus points for being one of the first three to claim a location, for being gone for a long time, for having a variety of cards, and for choosing the randomly determined "fad" location. Whichever player reaches 200 points first wins.

(The number of points declines with more players.)

Some players have complained that the scoring system is too complicated and that it slows the game. Keeping the rules sheet handy for the first few games, however, will alleviate this problem. Eventually, at least a few players will have the rules memorized and can quickly tally points.

While the game has two obvious challenges -- avoiding Captain Park and playing lots of cards -- it has a long-term strategy as well. Players need to decide if they will make numerous short trips to try and take as many bonus points as possible, or make one or two prolonged sojourns in an effort to score many cards at once. Each has advantages and disadvantages, and judging between them requires some thought.

One of the most impressive aspects of the game is how tightly integrated its theme is with its rules. When teaching the game to others, it's smart to begin with the Captain Park story because it makes the rules easier to remember. For example, "You can not claim to be on a trip if Captain Park has seen you recently" is easier to remember than "You lose your counters if the large pawn lands in your space."

Captain Park's Imaginary Polar Expedition combines humor, strategy, and a bit of luck in a great package that teaches us it is okay to lie to achieve fame.

--Brad Weier

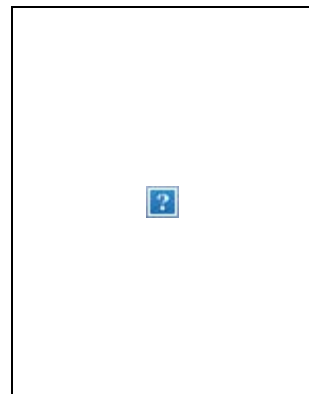
Pyramid Review

Metamorphosis Alpha Universe RPG

Published by [Fast Forward Entertainment](#)

Written by James M. Ward

64-page saddle stitched book; \$14.99



In the year of its silver jubilee, we are once again allowed to revisit one of the very first science fantasy RPGs: *Metamorphosis Alpha*. But then, there have been plenty of opportunities to pay the Starship Warden and its reiterations a visit over the last twenty-five years. *Metamorphosis Alpha* was originally released in 1976, before being superseded by the post-apocalyptic, Earth-set *Gamma World* in 1978. Another three editions followed, before culminating in the fourth edition sturdy paperback a decade ago, some of the rules for which show interesting similarities to *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*. Elements of the setting were also combined with first edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* in 1980 in the well-known scenario, *S3: Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*. TSR then took a step backwards to the original source material with *From Metamorphosis Alpha to Omega*, a complete setting for the somewhat innovative *Amazing Engine* rules, before switching back to post-apocalyptic irradiated earth for one of the last releases for the *Alternity* system. This proved less-than-popular, as it excised several elements from the previous versions, most notably the mutated plants and animals. Finally, as an aside and to finish off the history lesson, it could be argued that *Skyrealms of Jorune* falls within the *Metamorphosis Alpha* family, as the original *Jorune* campaign was a *Metamorphosis Alpha* game.

Thus James M Ward's *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe* comes with something of a baggage train . . . so what does it do to set it apart from its predecessors? In the original, the players were denizens of the *Starship Warden*, a generation colony ship whose course took it into a deadly radiation cloud. They set out from their villages to explore what they would eventually learn to be a rather limited world. Classic "captive universe" stuff really, but turned on its head with a large dose of radiation, often to quite mad, not to say, silly effect. Ward reworks this setting by casting the *Warden* as a giant science ship tasked to determine the fate of the many vessels lost during Earth's colonization program. The first ship it found was the *Bonnie Brown*; as the *Warden* closed, disaster struck!

An invisible object collided with the ship, breaching the *Warden's* hull and flooding it with mutagenic radiation, killing any crew not in suspended animation, disrupting shipboard systems -- including the many controlling artificial intelligences -- and warping much of the remaining flora and fauna on board. In the radiation's wake came aliens to conquer the ship as they had the *Bonnie Brown*. It is into this situation that the player characters find themselves . . .

Metamorphosis Alpha Universe comes with a ready-to-play campaign timeline in three parts, each of which determines what the players create as their characters. In Phase One, they are the robots activated by the ship to deal with the emergency. In Phase Two, the robots' reports lead the ship's AI to activate vats that create androids to aid the robots in both repairing and defending the *Warden*. Finally, as the situation escalates, soldiers are cracked from cryonic freeze to deal with the problem in Phase Three. The first and second phases are meant to last just a session or two, as are both the robot and android characters themselves . . . but should any survive, the players have the option of keeping these or creating human characters. The bulk of a campaign will entail exploring the *Warden* and clearing it of the newly created and mutating menace. In the long term, it could extend to exploring the *Bonnie Brown* and the invisible asteroid the aliens have rammed into the *Warden*.

All three types of characters have five attributes or ability scores. Constitution, which encompasses health, strength and in some cases agility; dexterity, which includes reaction time and speed, as well as agility, but not actually dexterity as the rules are written; leadership potential; mental resistance, which also covers intelligence or at least problem solving

and which can be improved by resisting mental attacks! Finally there is radiation resistance. Hit points are determined by rolling a d6 per point of constitution. High ability scores provide luck points, which can be spent to modify or even re-roll dice thrown in the game, though no method is giving for regaining luck points once they are expended.

Robot characters are created by selecting a power system, body style, electronic brain, tools, programs, and a method of propulsion from lists provided. Most types of robots can be designed and a sample of each is given -- general purpose, forestry, farming, engineering, medical, and security -- but there is no example of actually designing one from the ground up. The other problem is that the samples given are more capable than the system design allows. This is intentional and it is difficult to see why players would design their own robot when a more powerful option is available and ready to play.

Android characters come in three flavors -- computer, companion, and worker models -- with a mutated third, the killer, only available as an NPC. After rolling abilities, a player selects their android's software and is ready to go. To create a human character, the stats are rolled and that is it . . . no skills or abilities, although should they fail a radiation resistance roll, they might gain a mutation, but then they would no longer be a pure strain human and might possibly not be recognized by the ship's systems.

In addition to the lack of skills in the game, the quick revival of the humans by the ship has left them all with amnesia. This might be reflected in the rules in that a human character's mental resistance begins at a ludicrously low level and makes them comparative idiots compared to the robot or android character. Humans *do* get a +3 on all physical and mental ability checks, but this is poor recompense.

The mechanics of *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe* are simple: Compare an ability score against a difficulty number on the "Doing Things Table," or indeed any of the tables in the book. This gives a target number, which the player needs to match or exceed in a roll of 3d6. As a guideline, if an ability score matches the difficulty number, a player needs to roll sixteen or above. Although there are plenty of modifiers available from programs and the like, it seems an unnecessarily difficult target to roll.

Likewise, combat uses the same roll. Every weapon has a class, which is cross-referenced with the target's Armor Class. This gives a target number, which again must be rolled equal to or over. Strangely, if the Weapon Class matches a target's Armor Class, that roll is just ten and over. For example, this might be fist, daggers or claws -- all WC21, against unadorned flesh, which is AC21. Meanwhile, a pistol (WC18) only needs to roll a 7 or more. PCs can actually improve their ability to use weapons by using those of a Weapon Class successfully ten times or more in combat. Having done so, they become talented and their actual WC with that class of weaponry improves. Thus combat is actually easier to do in *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe* than any other kind of action . . .

One final thing should be mentioned about combat, in particular about weapons. Very few of them aboard the Warden are reusable. Their scientific designers, ignorant about combat, considered it more ecologically sound to have weapons recycle themselves once out of ammunition. So imagine the scene: the player has just fired the twentieth shot from his prized laser rifle when it breaks down into a pile of dust. As a design feature this may be ecologically friendly, and in game terms it presents a big challenge to the players, but otherwise it is absurd . . . utterly and totally absurd. The GM may enjoy the look on the players' faces when it first happens, but it will almost certainly more than irritate the heck out of them. It's easy to imagine characters (and players) holding a deep abiding grudge to the idiot scientist who thought this one up.

Besides the equipment and weapon lists, there are tables for mutations and a bestiary. The latter provides a decent starting selection, but none of the classic creatures from any of the previous versions of the game appear here, nor do the aliens that appear during Phase Three of the game. Of course, if the referee does have access to almost any version of *Gamma World*, then they have a ready source for equipment and creatures of all kinds.

The campaign is quite well-supported, beginning with a description of the seventeen levels of the Warden, which is some fifty miles long, twenty-five wide, and eight-and-a-half deep. Aboard are the varied flora and fauna of Earth and Mars, plus some hundred thousand individual crew, most of which are in suspended animation. Each deck is described in enough detail that the GM has starting information to help him draw and populate each one. This includes what equipment can be found there, its roleplaying possibilities, and its status during all three phases. Getting around will

not be easy; in addition to dealing with radiation, mutated plants and animals, and AIs no longer quite-so-friendly, the characters are going to have to find the color bands that will allow them access to different areas of the ship. Besides the various level descriptions, a complete deck is mapped and detailed, both as an example and as a location ready to play.

Of course, one feature found in previous editions of the game is the "making things work" chart, here given as the "Item Complexity" chart. Every weapon or object has an IC or Item Complexity, ranging from IC1 for items such as batteries, color bands, and energy lamps, through IC4 (for, say, a land rover vehicle) to various alien devices at IC8 and above. Both player and GM need to both roleplay and roll-play the deductive process if the Item Complexity chart is to work as intended and everyone is to get some enjoyment from the process.

Physically, the problems for *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe* start with the cover and move inwards . . . the irritatingly familiar front cover seems to have little to do with the contents. The back cover simply lists the rules highlights, but gives absolutely no detail of what *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe* is actually about. Thus the potential purchaser has no way into the game, and unless they already know about either *Gamma World* or *Metamorphosis Alpha*, there is no hook to make them buy *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe*.

Inside the problems continue with slipshod layout . . . in particular, poor use of space and art. The interior illustrations are decent pencils, but too many are full page pictures that could have been cut to a quarter of the size and the resulting space used to better effect. Primary among the most pointless illustrations has to be that of a spilt box of grenades. The senseless nature of the image is further compounded when it is flipped left-to-right and used again with perhaps two thirds of a single column of text covering it over! Tighter editing would have also removed repeated text, and better management of the white space would have made the need to repeat the picture of the grenades unnecessary.

Additionally, the book could have made better use of the color on the front and back inside covers. On the inside back cover is an illustration of the control panel found in the Warden's central lift. This is a decent and fun handout, which will keep the players guessing as they try to work out what it actually means. Conversely, the inside of the front cover is used to no good effect; it shows only the cross section of the Starship *Warden*. While this may be a useful visual of the layout of the decks aboard the ship, it in no way gains any benefit from being printed in color; if it were printed in black and white in the book itself, something more worthwhile could have been put in its place; ideally, this would have been the map provided for the example deck, which had so obviously been created in color . . .

It is difficult to see what *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe's* target audience really is. Despite its intimations that it is suited for new referees, this does not really seem to be the case. The rules feel rough and incompatible with each other, and they lack the coherence that is both demanded of today's market and generally welcomed by the novice GM. The author claims to have taken steps to update both some of the rules and instructions for this twenty-fifth anniversary edition, but this does not seem evident in *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe*. More evident are the elements mentioned from the original *Metamorphosis Alpha* of 1976, which only serves to give this update a very antiquated feel.

Despite the problems in *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe* you could run this game, even using the rules provided . . . but combined with the necessary flipping back and forth between tables, it probably would not be as fast nor as fun as the author intended. Yet there is a saving grace to be found in *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe*, and that is the setting and the campaign structure (despite the need for the GM to map out the *Warden's* levels). If the GM wants to use the background but not the rules, there are plenty of options available. One is TSR's *Alternity* system, particularly if they have access to the *Gamma World* supplement for the game. Another is TSR's *Amazing Engine*, which is readily compatible with the core concepts in *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe* using *From Metamorphosis Alpha To Omega*. Further, since the humans in *Metamorphosis Alpha Universe* are amnesia-stricken soldiers, *Bug Hunters* would fit nicely . . . more so if the bug hunt makes it to the *Bonnie Brown*, the map and situation for which could be as bad as that described in *From Metamorphosis Alpha to Omega*. In addition, *Bug Hunters* would provide ready made aliens if a campaign extends to that stage. Alternatively, *GURPS* provides just about everything a GM might want to utilize aboard the *Warden*, starting with *Compendium I, Biotech, Robots, Psionics, Space, Low Tech, High Tech, Ultra Tech* and *Ultra Tech 2*.

It is such a shame that this twenty-fifth anniversary redesign of a gaming classic fails to live up to that claim. Had this not been the case, Metamorphosis Alpha Universe would be more than an expensive campaign resource. As such a resource, it has plenty of potential, but GMs will need to unhitch from the cumbersome rules.

--*Matthew Pook*

Red Sphere Rising

"Besides, many of the corpses had no visible injuries at all -- but the faces of the fallen were distorted with wild horror. This last feature especially bewildered the old, experienced front-line soldiers who had seen so much in their lives. None of them could recall a case when soldiers who had been killed in battle were found with such expressions on their faces."

-- Vladimir V. Rubtsov, "Domes of Wrath", *Fate* (Apr 2002)

A frozen battlefield suddenly lights up with a giant red ball, seemingly mocking the bloody flags of dueling genocides. Over a thousand German soldiers dead, as soundless explosions blast the life from their bodies while leaving the skin unmarked. Crimson spheres blossom over the Soviet Union, and dart through the dark corners of the next half century. Listen, if you will, for the funeral dirge, the low threatening hum, the flickering fugue that is the music of the spheres.

"The immense red dome shone fearfully over the forest, with its even, sinister red color, giving no flashes or noise. As far as I can recall, one could see slight fluctuations of red light -- as if there were some turbulence inside the hemisphere."

-- testimony of Malyshevsk resident Nikolay Kernozhitskiy on the red sphere sighting over Malyshevsk, August, 1947

As the Wehrmacht retreated from the disastrous overstretch of the Stalingrad campaign, unit cohesion broke down in the vast expanses of the southern steppe. Individual brigades or regiments took up positions where they could, hoping to build defensive "hedgehogs" that would rebuff the advancing Soviet armies. In January of 1943, one such unit apparently dug in on the low hills between Vyselki and Tikhoretsk in the Kuban basin -- and dug in well enough to ambush and decimate a Soviet infantry battalion on the night of January 29. The Red Army pushed back through the area on February 5, but found no Germans -- alive.

On the night of January 29, 1943, the citizens of the small collective farm of Chelbas saw an enormous fiery red sphere rise up out of the hills to the northeast where, unbeknownst to them, the German brigade was entrenched and fighting off the Soviets. It grew to almost a kilometer in diameter before breaking up and dissolving soundlessly. Three minutes later, a second, slightly smaller sphere appeared, slightly to the north of the first one. It, too, expanded and disappeared without noise or smoke. The next morning, a farmer looking for hay came upon the battlefield -- where every man in a one-kilometer diameter, German and Soviet alike, lay dead. Much of the German ammunition and grenades had spontaneously detonated on their bodies, but even the unmarked figures were frozen corpses. 1,350 Germans died that night, according to later estimates. The Red Army occupied the site a week later and buried the bodies -- and the incident.

In August of 1947, another red sphere just like the Kuban phenomenon (this one only half a kilometer across) appeared to the northeast of the village of Malyshevsk, deep in the Soviet Far East near the Amur River valley. It appeared for five or six minutes before the villagers fled inside in panic. There were no burn marks in the forest or on the taiga when investigators finally reached the area decades later -- but the townsfolk of Malyshevsk had all been moved to other locations in the Khabarovsk province.

"We heard a noise and we looked up, and saw a red light coming toward us over the trees. From our viewpoint, it looked to be about 100 feet high. It looked like it was setting itself up to land . . . There was no sound at all, we were almost hypnotized. Suddenly, the red light 'exploded.' The place was filled with all sorts of colors. I was blinded, then the colors died down and my eyesight returned. There was a machine there, right in front of us . . . there was a triangular shape there now, covered with pipes and valves, stuff like that."

-- testimony of Airman Larry Waters on the Rendlesham Forest sighting at Bentwaters AFB, December 27, 1980

The obvious explanation for the Kuban spheres is some sort of experimental artillery ordnance (possibly poison gas shells) detonated by accident during the firefight on the hills. If the Red Army confiscated the remaining ammunition (perhaps from the ammo dump at Tikhoretsk that they overran that week), secret tests of the haul might explain the Malyshevsk sightings of it as well. However, the absence of sound in both cases, as well as the peculiar lighting effect, makes the "secret ammunition" case somewhat difficult to sustain.

Unsavory Nazi ammo dumps also probably don't explain the numerous other "crimson sphere" and "red sphere" sightings that litter the UFOlogical record. From the "bloody suns" seen over medieval battlefields to the more pedantically documented "red moon" seen in Petworth, Sussex on August 11, 1855 and the "magnificent red object" observed by the astronomer Coggia in Marseilles on August 1, 1871, to the red spheres observed over Zurich in the summer of 1966, Thailand in October of 1996, Phoenix in March of 1997, and Calgary in March of 2001, the red spheres are everywhere. Some of the most seminal sightings in UFO literature include red spheres, including the Rendlesham Forest sighting in 1980, the Washington, D.C. flap in July of 1952, and the Gulf Breeze visitations of the mid-1990s.

"But what is the nature of the lights themselves? The anecdotal literature contains descriptive themes that are repeated so often, from different times and places, that it is highly probable objective characteristics are being referred to. From this considerable reservoir of data, we learn that the lights can be any colour, though white, orange, deep red and yellow-gold predominate. Their size can range from ping-pong balls of luminosity to giant lightforms"
-- Paul Devereaux, "Earth Lights and UFOs"

One intriguing explanation for the red spheres -- and for many UFO sightings in general -- comes out of an investigation by Paul Devereaux into a series of "blood-red sphere" appearances near Harlech and Llanfair in Wales in 1904 and 1905. He discovered that these "UFO" reports closely tracked the minor fault line running through the region, and further examination of the 1981-1984 Hessdalen Lights in Norway (which included NATO observers and university officials) revealed a similar pattern. (Previous UFO researchers such as Aimé Michel had linked UFO activity to "earth energies," and Charles Fort, of course, had noted the strong correlation of mysterious sightings to earthquake zones. It's worth noting that 1943 was the most seismically active year of the 20th century.) Devereaux and his partner Michael Persinger developed the Tectonic Strain Theory (or "earth light theory") of UFOs, which blamed electrostatic energy built up by tectonic strain -- especially in areas with high metallic content, such as the copper mines of Hessdalen or the gold mines of Malyshevsk -- for many UFO phenomena including motor failures, strange humming sounds, and weird radar interference.

By this thesis, "earth lights" are actually plasmas which, like UFOs, often appear silvery or metallic in daylight and reddish by night. One You-Sou Zou (of, bizarrely, the Beijing Institute of Atmospheric Physics and the Department of Meteorology at the University of Utah) apparently studied the Hessdalen data and determined that the photographs matched laboratory-created plasmas, especially in their corkscrew-like light traces. This, apparently, says "plasma vortex" to Dr. Zou. To other people, "plasma vortex" says all kinds of exciting things, including "Zero Point Energy," "soliton creation," and "energy wave propagation." Somewhere in here, the "mercury vortex" theory of UFO propulsion can meet our tasty [Red Mercury](#) in a scarlet, glowing plasma vortex of pseudoscientific evil. Which is as good a point as any to recall that Nikola Tesla devoted much of his career to, well, making ball lightning and plasmas -- and allegedly causing earthquakes -- up in the old silver-mining town of Telluride, Colorado. Did his experiments transform (or domesticate) "earth lights" into a potential superweapon? Did the Soviets salvage his secrets from the Nazis and test them in Malyshevsk?

"On one occasion a party of four of us -- including a lieutenant colonel -- watched a pulsating red fireball sail up silently to a point directly over the American-German front lines in 1944 during the Battle of Normandy. It stopped completely for 15 minutes before moving on."
-- George Todt, *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*

Which brings us back around to World War Two and lights over the Nazi sky. On the Western Front, the mysterious "red spheres" showed up as "foo fighters," mysterious balls of glowing energy that trailed airplanes. The first foo fighters appeared in 1942, with 1944 the bonanza year for sightings: the "red ball" foo fighters that dogged allied planes over the Rhine in November and the "large orange glows" over Hagenau, Germany on December 22 are only the best-documented sightings of hundreds. Allied military figures believed that the *feuerballs* were Nazi secret weapons. Red spheres and foo fighters were not restricted to the European theater, however; in a nice parallel to our many other August cases, on August 10, 1944, an intense red or orange foo fighter paced a B-29 for eight minutes between Sumatra and Ceylon. Could the Nazis (whose mercury-laden submarines plied these exact waters) have transferred some experimental Red Sphere technology to the devotees of the Red Sun?

"As you find yourself heading for the red sphere of Martian Geburah, you may feel arrogance rising in your blood . . . Theoretically, Geburah is one of the seats of justice, especially when counterbalanced by Chesed, and it should be possible to have wrongs righted courtesy of this sphere, if the Powers deem that they are indeed wrongs. It is not a particularly pleasant stop, but its might is impressive. . . . This is, of course, the sphere in which wars are fought and lost -- or won."

-- Kala Trobe, *Magic of Qabalah*

Which Red Sun, of course, is the symbol of the powerful alien entity who founded Japan -- the goddess Amaterasu. The Egyptian god Ra, also, is depicted as a red sphere in traditional art and symbology such as the uraeus crown; red spheres often appear above the Persian Gulf, the cradle of human civilization. Have the red spheres been shaping our wars and empires for millennia? Do the earth lights dream, buried down in the rocky depths between conductive metal formations in piezoelectric quartz, nodes in a lattice of vortices and ley lines that make up the great alien intelligence below the Earth? Do they war with the atmospheric [entities](#) above the sky, or slave under the lash of [HAARP](#)'s global deep tomography? Did Tesla discover a means to awaken the red spheres, or to create artificial spheres replicating the slumbering etheric deities with which he communed? And was the red sphere that obliterated a Nazi regiment a foot-fighting wonder-weapon gone haywire, a summoning they could not control . . . or an angry mother punishing the misuse of her children? Does the Red Sphere gaze balefully at our continuing hubris, building up tectonic stress until the world can become a gigantic Kuban zone? Indeed, perhaps all we have to fear is sphere, Itself.

Aulos: City in the Sky

by Matt Riggsby

Dreamers may build castles the sky, but denizens of fantasy worlds can put entire cities there. Aulos is suitable for pseudo-medieval fantasy campaigns with a moderately high level of magic. Specifically, magical air travel should be possible, but not necessarily commonplace . . . although mundane air travel, such as hot-air balloons, large flying animals, or steampunkish ornithopters, may stand in its place.

Geography and Land Use

Aulos is unique: a city built on the surface of an immense flying rock, just over a half-mile across at its widest and some 400 yards thick. The rock is shaped like an inverted mountain, flat on the top, tapering to a sharp ridge on the underside. The city has no fixed whereabouts. It drifts along at about 30 yards above the surface at the speed of a slow walk, sometimes following prevailing winds, sometimes drifting in directions which seem random.

The city sometimes rotates, but at no fixed speed or direction, so points of the compass and direction of turn aren't useful for giving directions. Residents usually navigate by landmarks ("Go to the back of the Private Palace, turn left and go until you get to the empty fountain . . . "). If general directions must be given, the city's own "compass points" are templewards (in the direction from the center to the Broken Temple), crystalwards (from the center to the Crystal Field), and palacewards (towards the Private Palace). Confusingly enough, in addition to the three cardinal directions, the city is divided into four administrative quarters.

Due to its physical size and intermittent supply problems, Aulos is relatively small in terms of population. It is typically home to about 45,000, packed densely into the small area, although periods of plague have caused the population to drop to at low as about 20,000. The top surface of Aulos is almost entirely covered with buildings.

History

The earliest reports of Aulos indicate that it was discovered by explorers in a remote mountainous region, uninhabited and mostly undeveloped. Explorers found the Crystal Field, the Broken Temple (a ruin even then), and the bones of reptile-like humanoids. The floating mountain remained remote from the centers of civilization until it was encountered by growing empires centuries later. By then, it was inhabited by a tribe of winged bird-men who would hunt and gather on the ground, then return to their modest huts. Aulos remained an amazing but essentially useless curiosity until it caught the attention of the Sealed Collegium, a hermetic brotherhood of sorcerers whose members were in constant conflict with mundane authorities. Under the legendary Xiang the Silent, they seized the floating mountain, killed or enslaved the bird-men, brought up their own followers, and established a citadel where they could pursue their magic without interference.

Under the Collegium, Aulos became a threat to the countries it passed over, extracting tribute from those regions and reacting to resistance with increasing force. Worse yet, the Collegium learned to direct the movements of the city, making it a greater threat. At least one kingdom collapsed into chaos as Aulos made sure that its demands would not be resisted. At last, after nearly a century of terror, the Collegium set their sights on an empire with an underpowered military but considerable wealth. The emperor at this time was Tyrus IV, a formidable diplomat who had long been considering how Aulos might be defeated, and now he was forced to bring his considerable skill to bear on the problem. His overt steps were to hire mercenary armies and make arrangements with supernatural entities to harass the

Aulos: City in the Sky



Collegium and slow their city's progress, but his master stroke was hidden until the very end. Aided by daring agents and informers, Tyrus played on tensions within the Collegium itself, forcing members' differences into the open and eventually precipitating violent conflict among them. Deeply wounded from internal problems and beset from without, Aulos capitulated in a carefully negotiated surrender and was occupied by the empire.

Determined not to allow the problems posed by a free-roaming Aulos, Tyrus hit on a plan to anchor the city. A group of wizards and giants (and, some say, demons) were employed to anchor Aulos to the earth with enormous adamantite chains. Aulos remained high in the air, but it was fixed over a single point. It grew long stairways and even water-powered elevators. In a few decades, a settlement grew up on the ground underneath, becoming Aulos Below, counterpart to Aulos Above. A special governor (the Principe) was installed to oversee the city. The Sealed Collegium survived as a faint shadow of its former self, with the Grand Keeper of the Collegium reduced to a civic functionary, although a few former members who had secretly sided with the empire stayed on.

Although stripped of much of its looted wealth, Aulos remained an important center of magical learning, becoming all the more important as its less hostile administration allowed more communication and visitors from outside. But the empire slowly began to decay, as empires do. As it shrank under the incursions of barbarian migrations, Aulos became an important center for provincial defenses, and the Principe became a semi-independent military ruler. Eventually, the city was attacked by a massive horde with powerful magical support. The barbarians overran Aulos Below and, in defiance and desperation, the Principe at the time, called Black Geraldus (he was reputed to be a brutal ruler), ordered the chains broken. Once unanchored, the city drifted away. With the chains broken and the elevators and stairways destroyed, the barbarians let it go and made themselves content with sacking Aulos Below.

As the empire collapsed under it, Aulos was now a free city under the authority of the Principe. Initially, the Principe was an absolute ruler, with the city council serving in an advisory capacity. However, without the support of the empire, a succession of Princes found it necessary to allow more and more democratic elements in the government. First the office of tribune was created to counterbalance the Principe's authority, then the council's power increased to become the main legislative body.

For the past few centuries, Aulos has been a far more peaceful place than in its earlier days. It no longer has the magical might to demand tribute from the territories it passes over. Instead, it relies on trade to get what it needs. Supply is occasionally a serious issue when the city drifts over deserts, large forests, and other areas well away from farmers, but it has ample storehouses and enough magical resources to extend meager food supplies in a pinch. Of course, "peaceful" is a relative term. The city frequently finds itself dealing with jurisdictional problems when it floats over the territory of a ruler eager to tax its wealthy inhabitant, and it can find itself vulnerable to pirate raids when it is far from its allies.

Government

Aulos is nominally ruled by a hereditary Principe. The Principe is the city's supreme magistrate and commander in chief of the militia. He appoints a number of governmental officials (or at least approves them), calls and dismisses city council meetings at will, and has final approval over new laws and taxes. The current Principe is the elderly Vadinus III, a brilliant politician and basically fair ruler but childless, ailing, and jaded. One of the major checks on the Principe's power is the office of the tribune. The tribune is selected by lot annually from heads of household. He doesn't vote with the city council except in cases of a tie, but he attends their meetings, advises the Principe, and has the power to veto new laws. As occasionally happens, this year's tribune is a bit useless: Wexen the tailor, an affable, chubby man who tries very hard not to disagree with anybody.

The city council consists of a diverse body of officials: four guildmasters, each of whom must be from separate guilds, four quarter-judges (one for each quarter of the city), two members of the Sealed Collegium, the Master of the Palace, and the Colonel of the Militia. Quarter-judges are appointed for three years at a time by the Principe; quarter-judges are usually older citizens of established wisdom, but notable foreigners may be appointed to avoid favoritism. The Master of the Palace is appointed for life (or until voluntary retirement), while the Colonel of the Militia may be appointed and removed at will. Collegians are selected by the Grand Keeper of the Collegium, who may not himself serve; the current Keeper, Yllario the Red, is more interested in scholarship than politics, and his choices have been

eccentric. The guildmasters are selected by a combination of lot, negotiation among the masters, and popular vote of the guilds. As a result, councilman guildmasters are usually career politicians or timeservers. A seat on the council is reserved for the King of the Dead, who has never attended.

In addition to creating new laws (to be approved by the Principe), members of the council act as magistrates for different sections of the population: quarter-judges for cases in their part of the city, guildmasters for cases involving guild members, Collegians for magicians and magical creatures, the Colonel of the Militia for soldiers, and the Master of the Palace for foreigners and trade disputes. If parties to a case cross categories, the case must be heard by an appropriate combination of magistrates. For example, a dispute between a visiting wizard and a guildsman from the third quarter of the city will involve the Master of the Palace, a Collegian, a guildmaster, and the third quarter-judge. These high magistrates may appoint deputies to hold cases in their stead. The Master of the Palace in particular maintains a staff of deputies. Councilors usually prefer hearing cases (and collecting judging fees) to deliberating legislation, so few new laws are ever passed.

Two members of the council have other governmental responsibilities. The Colonel of the Militia is the civic militia's commander in the field. While the militia is mostly for show, the Colonel does have day-to-day command over the militia's core, the cavaliers. The current Colonel, Aram Attuk, is a former mercenary captain; he has little interest in politics and a cloudy past, but he is a shrewd warrior. The Master of the Palace (the harried but inexhaustible Maisu Khano) oversees day-to-day administration of the Public Palace, including scheduling public events and assigning spaces to vendors. While this may seem a small task, he actually has considerable power over how commerce is conducted in Aulos.

There are several other officials without councilman power. For example, the dockmaster oversees use of the Floating Docks and the loading and unloading of goods. The Keeper of the Field is charged with keeping the Crystal Field in good order and regulating its exploitation. The Constable (Tytos Chuk, sour and unfriendly but fiendishly clever) is a guardian of the public peace, a sort of chief of police with a commission to keep private problems from rising to the level of public problems: stopping brawls, quelling arguments before they become violent, keeping an eye on suspicious persons and activities, and administering a body of night watchmen (seconded from the militia) to prevent thefts and burglaries. He also maintains a staff of proctors to assist him. These officials serve at the pleasure of the Principe.

The King of the Dead is not a position so much as a symbol . . . or at least a legendary character. He purportedly rules the catacombs under the city and keeps peace among the bodies of the dead. Tradition has it that the Sealed Collegium got permission from the King of the Dead (after a week of silent negotiation with Xiang) for the living to occupy the surface of Aulos, but there have been no credible reports of any meeting with him for centuries. He is generally regarded as neither hostile nor particularly friendly to the living, only concerned with keeping his realm in quiet order. He is also the object of occasional religious -- or at least superstitious -- practices, such as burning incense or dropping small valuables into deep holes as a means of ensuring a comfortable afterlife.

Armed Forces

The largest armed force of Aulos is the militia, a part-time army composed of one adult male from each family. The militia has a theoretical strength of about 4,000, but almost never meets in its entirety. Members from each quarter of the city are called to assemble for inspection at the Public Palace once a month. They are to present themselves with arms and armor (requirements are loose; a spear, short bow, and leather jacket are sufficient) and drill briefly or face a nominal fine. Many end up paying the fine. Three members of the militia in each quarter are also pressed into service each month to serve as night watchmen in assisting the Constable, or they may sponsor another in their place. Many choose the latter, so the city has a semi-regular body of watchmen.

The core of the militia is a special regiment called the cavaliers, a body of about 80 men provided or sponsored by the wealthiest families. The cavaliers are full-time soldiers. They must provide their own arms, but are provided with board and lodging in the Private Palace, a comfortable stipend, and exemption from a number of taxes. Entrance is competitive; cavaliers must pass an elaborate examination including tests of strength, endurance, and marksmanship.

The regiment drills frequently, and many cavaliers carry enchanted items, making them an even more formidable force.

Still, Aulos's main defense is the fact that it's difficult to attack a city on top of a flying rock. The militia is, at best, a semi-trained rabble, and the cavaliers are too small to have much effect in a pitched battle. In case of prolonged or serious threat, the city is perfectly willing to hire mercenaries, and the Sealed Collegium may, in extreme emergency, be pressed into service for magical support.

Commerce and Industry

When it is near inhabited areas, Aulos does a brisk trade in fine manufactured items, magical labor, and the city's most distinctive export, high-quality crystals. The city's industries are dominated by the six major guilds:

- **Clothiers:** Includes weavers, embroiderers, leatherworkers, carpet-makers, cobblers, and tailors. Because there is no water power to power looms and little space to put smelly trades like tanning, little raw cloth is produced. Instead, guild members usually import cloth and hides and turn them into fine clothing.
- **Crystalliers:** The crystalliers are almost unique to Aulos. They work with material culled from the Crystal Field. They engage in shipping, manufacture of musical and optical devices, jewelry-making, and preparation of items for enchantment by magicians.
- **Dockmen:** The dockmen are primarily employed in loading and unloading vessels landing at the Floating Docks. Carpenters may join as special members to maintain the docks and flying vessels.
- **Merchants:** Any resident of the city who wishes to import or export goods in significant quantities must join the merchants' guild.
- **Scribes:** The guild of scribes includes a number of learned professions, including scribes, bookmakers, and lawyers.
- **Silversmiths:** This guild includes metalworkers of all kinds. However, most metalwork in the city is on a small scale, involving jewelry and small mechanical devices, such as water clocks.

Tradesmen operating more-or-less permanent establishments (bakers, grocers, furniture-makers, and such) are eligible to join a catch-all organization, the Lesser Guild. The Lesser Guild provides its members with no formal political representation, so it serves as little more than a drinking club for members of the lower middle class with unrealistic aspirations for power. Itinerant peddlers, servants, money-lenders, and most other people may not join any guild.

Magicians may not join a guild. Rather, they fall under the authority of the Sealed Collegium, which in turn is subject to intense scrutiny from the Principe (magicians who want to export enchanted items must, technically, sell them to a merchant who can, in turn, export them). The Collegium has only about 50 full-fledged members, but it exercises authority over nearly 800 students (mostly foreigners) and a similar number of spellcasters resident in the city.

Only natives of Aulos may join a guild, but resident foreigners may practice their craft if they are granted a license by the guild and pay heavy dues, equivalent to about three weeks of income (double what a native would pay). The major guilds encompass about 15% of the city's adult population (500-600 members each), with another 30% eligible for the Lesser Guild and the rest guildless, although many work for guild members.

Although the city's industries are dominated by the guilds, Aulos's lifeblood is commerce with a constantly shifting array of foreigners. Therefore, it is relatively friendly to outsiders. Inns and hostels abound near the floating docks. New arrivals are given a cursory search by the dockmaster's deputies to ensure they aren't returning exiles; docking fees are nominal. However, non-residents should know that they must initially enter the city through the docks. Landing elsewhere without a letter of permission will lead to fines and more detailed searches at the very least.

Everyday Life

Clothing

Most residents of Aulos wear similar costume: sandals or slippers, tight leggings, a loose vest or shirt, and a front-

opening belted tunic. When Aulos is in colder climates, boots appear and layers of robes are added. Poorer citizens wear a turban, or at least a head-cloth secured with a pin or band. Wealthier residents wear fitted caps of various sizes and shapes. For example, small, floppy caps for merchants, skullcaps for people who engage in delicate crafts, tall cylinders for scribes. Physicians wear blue capes, while prostitutes wear red scarves. Magicians wear black robes with colored ribbons on their arms indicating their rank in the Collegium. Senior members traditionally wear masks while performing their duties. Initially, the masks were blank black cloth, meant to conceal the member's identity, but they have since become elaborately personalized.

Cuisine

Food in Aulos is, by necessity, eclectic. Because the city passes over so many different regions, there is little consistency in available ingredients. Therefore, instead of specific dishes, the cooks of Aulos have developed a broad style of cooking. The Aulos style involves preserved foods (salted, smoked, dried, or pickled) cut up finely, heavily spiced, cooked quickly, and served on a bland bed of cooked grains or wrapped in flatbread or vegetable leaves. The favorite dish of Aulos is kursu, a cake of spiced meal with a dab of sweet fruit paste at the center and fried in oil. Kursu can be bought from itinerant vendors on any street corner.

Buildings and Street Life

Most buildings in Aulos are made from dark gray brick, three or four stories high. Ground floors are usually given over to stores and businesses, with residences on upper floors and brick-lined cisterns below. Instead of walls and doors, first-floor building fronts often have sideways-folding wooden shutters, letting occupants open up as much or as little of the building as desired. Roofs are often flat to allow easy landings to flying visitors, or simply for open-air gatherings. Many people keep small domestic animals (birds, dogs, friendly reptiles), but horses are all but unknown. Most heavy carrying is done by wheelbarrow.

The streets of Aulos are narrow (often little more than a single cart-width), paved with brick or cobbles, and unnamed. With a dense population and relatively inexpensive magical lighting, they are never completely empty, day or night. Even in the small hours, one can often find a few men on their way home from a tavern or a kursu vendor with a small brazier and pot of bubbling oil. A number of street corners are furnished with magical fountains, which consist of a narrow spout producing a constant, if small, drizzle of water and a deep basin below it. Collectively, they supply about half of the city's water. The water is freely available, but it is considered rude to take more than half of the water currently in the basin. Neighbors often meet by the fountains to gossip.

Recreation

In addition to the usual recreations of drinking, dancing (the Aulos style involves many skipping and hopping steps and tight pirouettes), and gambling (tabba, a complex game involving pyramidal dice and colored plaques resembling dominos, is a favorite), instrumental music is popular, particularly small horns and crystal chimes. Aulos has a long tradition of literacy, so reading aloud is common, but theatrical performances are rare. Still, performances are sometimes put on at the Public Palace. Wrestling and competitive climbing are popular sports, but there are few team sports, perhaps because there are so few large spaces in which to play them.

Places to Go and Things to See

Map of Aulos



- **Public Palace:** The public palace is Aulos's largest paved space. It consists of four tall stories of portico around an open area about fifty yards across at its widest. By tradition, the first two tiers are occupied by transient peddlers and merchants who have come to the city to sell their wares. The rest are used for small meetings of civic groups. The courtyard may be used as market space, room for popular assemblies, a sporting field, or an impromptu courtroom for particularly notable cases.
- **Private Palace:** The private palace (also called Tyrus's Hall), a luxurious and well-fortified building, is the seat of the city's government. It houses the Principe's apartments, a council chamber, offices for members of the city council, clerks and other servants of the government, and the cavaliers' barracks. The lowest levels are used as a prison, and the outermost tower is often used as a courtroom, with executions performed from a large open window.
- **Collegium Tower:** The Sealed Collegium maintains its original headquarters, a black marble pyramid. In its heyday, it was reserved for full members of the Collegium, and it was richly furnished and decorated. These days, it houses a number of magicians, their apprentices, servants, and a number of large rooms used interchangeably as refectories, classrooms, warehouses, and laboratories. While it now serves a more utilitarian function, the building itself is still quite fine.
- **Moorings:** When the city was anchored, enormous holes were drilled in the underside of the city at four points to fasten the moorings, as well as smaller holes for anchoring stays and workmen's scaffolding. The anchors are long gone, but the attachment points are home to a set of shanty towns. The Moorings, as these neighborhoods have become known, are a collection of rickety wooden buildings held in place by ropes, chains, nets, and some wishful thinking. Because of the poor lighting, the difficulty of building sturdy structures, and the inherent danger of building over a fall of several hundred yards, the Moorings are the city's poorest district and treated as dens of footpads and murderers. However, respectable citizens go down the narrow stairways from the upper side for a taste of the wilder life.
- **Crystal Field:** The Crystal Field is the city's other large open space. The Crystal Field is an irregularly shaped area where clear and faintly colored bunches of crystals stand here and there, like stands of vegetation on a field of coarse white crust. The crystals appear in bunches with one or two large ones at the center and smaller ones clustered around them. The tallest are about ten feet high, but most are three or less. A curious aspect of the field is that the crystals are growing. Growth rate is related to size, with small crystals growing fastest. The crystals, which may be harvested with a bit of careful hammering, have a number of uses, from musical instruments (each chimes with a distinct note when struck) to magical adjuncts. The guild of crystalliers harvests about 500 pounds of new crystals (two inches long or less) each year, providing a significant source of income for the city. The removal of larger crystals is generally prohibited and can only be performed with the permission of the

Keeper of the Field.

- **Broken Temple:** Older than any human construction in Aulos, the Broken Temple is an octagonal building made from a single piece of a green jade-like material. The temple is carved with elaborate, fluid scrollwork in a unique alien style. The inside of the temple is open, furnished with nothing but a stone table twelve feet on each side in the center. Before human habitation began, the temple was apparently attacked, caving its ceiling and part of the walls. The temple interior and its immediate surroundings are littered with blocks of green rubble. The stone is very hard but not unworkable, and it might be used to produce jewelry. However, the temple and its stone are generally held to be unlucky. For that reason, the area immediately around the temple is uninhabited and overgrown with weeds.
- **Catacombs:** The flying mountain on which Aulos is built isn't solid rock. It has a number of excavated basements, underground cisterns, and natural caves permeating the rock. Many of these structures are linked into a network known collectively as the catacombs. The upper layers of the catacombs are fairly well mapped, if little used. However, the deeper layers are poorly understood and largely avoided. There is reason to believe that the lower tunnels change from time to time, so map-making is a dubious enterprise. An honorable burial in Aulos consists of being carried into the catacombs and left. Bodies disappear in a matter of days and are said to have been taken by the King of the Dead. The few attempts to explore the catacombs in detail have failed (the tunnels seem to resist scrying magic), and some of the search parties have vanished without a trace.
- **Bastions:** While the top surface of Aulos is fairly level, it has a pair of steep stone outcroppings called the bastions for their resemblance to stumpy defensive towers. They are too steep to build on, but they are occasionally used as lookout posts.
- **Floating Docks:** Between the Crystal Field and the Private Palace is the center of Aulos's commerce, the floating docks. The docks are broad (about twenty feet across) wooden avenues which extend over 200 yards into empty air. No mundane wooden structure could stand the strain; the secret lies in the use of magical wood and reinforcing enchantments. Flying vessels of all kinds tie up here, and smaller flyers (flying animals, magic carpets, etc.) can descend on them like a road. The wood is quite thick, and is protected by magical fireproofing.

Campaigns and Adventures

Aulos can be used much like any other city. PCs could, for example, become enmeshed in civic politics. The current Prince is in poor health and has no clear heir. Power could fall to one of four cousins; factions are already forming around them. Craftsman PCs might campaign for increased privileges for their guild, or ambitious PCs might angle for appointments to civic offices. Warfare is also a constant possibility. PCs could be airborne raiders attacking Aulos for a little loot, soldiers of a kingdom over which Aulos is passing trying to seize it for their own, or Aulos's own soldiers defending it from outside threats or launching retaliations. The presence of wealth, trade, and a community of magicians makes Aulos a natural destination for merchants and PCs seeking specialized advice and equipment. Other adventures may arise from the city's unique situation. For example, heroes might attempt to contact the King of the Dead, explore the history of the prehuman reptile and bird-man inhabitants, or find out what makes the city fly. Here are some other possibilities:

- **Romancing the Stones:** While crystal harvesting is theoretically controlled by the crystallier's guild, casual poaching is common. Most residents have a small crystal surreptitiously taken on a youthful dare or quietly lifted and given as a gift by a suitor. Removing larger crystals or batches of crystals is far more difficult, but that doesn't stop people from trying sometimes. PCs may decide to steal a large crystal (as a magical adjunct, the object of a quest, or simply because it's valuable). They may attempt a quick smash-and-grab, landing a flying vehicle in the field, grabbing a crystal, and taking off, but the whole city could see them and dispatch pursuit at a moment's notice. They may be more successful in taking a crystal out of the field under cover of a distraction and carrying it deep into the city, hiding it for a while, and smuggling it out, but even that will present considerable problems. Just getting a large crystal out of the field without being detected is a heroic feat, and its theft will trigger a massive investigation.
- **Herb gathering:** It may be unusual soil conditions, or perhaps a natural emanation of magic, but nooks and crannies in the sloping underside of the rock on which Aulos is built are home to a variety of useful plants and animals. Though not in constant demand, many species are very rare, so some residents of the Moorings make a good -- if dangerous -- living by climbing along the underside in search of valuable wildlife. Most "hangers" are

poor, territorial, and desperate enough to spend days at a time hanging from hand-made climbing gear, facing treacherous handholds and small but vicious animals who could cause them to lose their grip and plummet to their death. Gathering from the underside is unregulated by the Principe (although individual hangers won't hesitate to sabotage poachers on their turf), so PCs may enter this dangerous profession in order to find something vital for an important spell or, if they're down-and-out, try their hand as a risky way to raise some funds.

- **Taking the Wheel:** One of the long-lost secrets of Aulos is how the Collegium directed its movements. If PCs could unravel the mystery, it could be worth a lot of money or political power. A series of clues may lead them through the jealously guarded archives of the Sealed Collegium or on a perilous crawl through the catacombs to find missing parts of a magical manuscript. And even if they do reconstruct the method, they may have to convince others in Aulos that they've found the *right* method, a difficult task since people claiming to have the secret are likely to be regarded as either lying or insane.

An Open Letter To Game Designers

I've developed a new game that I'm sure will be a big hit, and thought you might be interested.

It's a simplified version of baseball. It consists of only two bases and one outfielder instead of the usual four bases and three outfielders. Pitchers will only be able to throw one type of pitch . . . the fastball. (Although this game will use a special ball that keeps it from being thrown *too* fast.) Extraneous options -- like bunting, sliding, stealing bases, and other complicated bits -- will be discarded. The game will consist of one side trying to hit the ball and running to first base or home, while the other side tries to throw the ball fast enough so the other side doesn't hit it, or (barring that) trying to catch the ball to tag the player at the base.

This game will be called Basicball.

Basicball will be designed with the sole purpose of introducing new players to "real" baseball; by using a simplified game, how can we *fail* to gather new bodies into the exciting hobby of baseball?

[BONK!]

Well, I've just been hit in the head by an errant ball. Now, this might be because I've been thwacked by our non-American readers who don't know (or care) what [baseball](#) is. But I suspect that the Fates have provided me with a modicum of common sense, packaged it in a dense sphere, and knocked me upside the head with it.

Because Basicball is a silly idea.

A few minutes of thought will make one realize that there's almost no incentive for someone to bother learning Basicball; it's certainly not any more fun than traditional baseball, and almost anyone exposed to Basicball will probably wonder why they don't just go ahead and learn baseball if they were going to go to the trouble of learning a new game.

Which brings me, circuitously (as ever) to gaming.

I've seen a fair number of games in the past couple of years that have purported to be basic introductory versions of other games. And many of these games have had moderate (at best) to weak (at worst) sales . . . to the point where many game manufacturers wonder if there's a point to producing these introductory games.

Well, in my humble opinion . . . no, not really. At least, not as we think of them.

Most introductory games I've seen have stripped their parent game down of much of the complexity of the original -- which may or may not be good -- while not *adding* anything to the game . . . which is bad, as I see it.

Now, most of us are introduced to gaming from friends, meaning that such introductory products are probably limited to a target audience of those who *aren't* part of a group that wants to play the game (or can't find such a group). So people who buy these introductory sets generally get a pale imitation of the "real" game; presuming they're still playing the game when they decide to "upgrade" from those sets, the introductory set won't have much (if anything) to offer then. And that's assuming they *do* move on; since the experience provided by those introductory sets is often a diminutive version of the "real" version, players may get bored and move on. Those who upgrade to the full game may resent the fact that the introductory set is then moot.

So what's the solution? Well, partly it could be just to make such introductions free, instead of charging for them; I've written before about how I was introduced into some games by [freebee versions](#). But there is another answer. I note that the most successful "introductory" games -- those games that often succeed at bringing in gamers into other pursuits -- seem to stand apart as their own pursuits.

Mini-golf, for example, offers some experiences and play possibilities of "real" golf, yet stands on its own as a separate game, offering unique experiences and goals. ("I used a 4-iron to ricochet off the clown's head into the loop-de-loop" is *not* something generally heard in most golf clubhouses.) People can play either game without thinking they're playing a "lesser" version of the original.

Or *Fighting Fantasy* books, while not being an exact substitute for tabletop gaming, offers many of the same ideas: a combat system, the notion that the player's decisions advance the plot, the actual *existence* of a compelling plot, and so on. Too many introductory sets I've seen nowadays have had adventures that have bored my silly ("Your first adventure: Kill two goblins. Your second adventure: Kill five goblins."). Compare that to the original *Lone Wolf* books, the *Sorcery!* series, the *Mystery of the Snow Pearls* solo adventure for the original *Dungeons & Dragons* boxed game, and so on. Heck, some of the *Advanced Endless Quest* books had solo versions of classic *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures within their paperback pages (like *Ravenloft* and *Ghost Tower of Inverness*). And, at the cost of a standard paperback book, they were also at a small enough price point that a potential buyer wasn't faced with the decision between a \$20.00 introductory boxed set and a \$30.00 core rulebook for the "real" game.

Mage Knight follows this trend as well; although not as complex as most miniatures games, and lacking the painting requirements of their older cousins, it still *adds* a great deal to the genre: collectable models, speed of play, and so on. (As an aside, I'll be curious to see if the *Chainmail* game brings in any new players to the tabletop *Dungeons & Dragons* game, since it seems like both are designed to flow into each other quite well.)

Anyway, I note that these examples, perhaps above all else, give the player a taste of another game, while not making him regret partaking in the "introductory" activity. These games provide an easier entry into an alternate "primary" game, even using much the same terminology and objectives, while standing on their own.

Of course, the biggest problem is that coming up with a game that is introductory-to-but-different-from another requires a fair bit of innovation . . . certainly more than simply paring down another full game into a simpler -- but less satisfying -- version. But the potential rewards could well be worth it; in addition to funneling new blood into your game, you may well create a *new* gaming phenomenon, giving yourself a whole new audience.

And I have utmost faith this can be done; after all, I've seen the kind of full-fledged games the industry is capable of when it puts its mind to it. And then we can eat some nachos and sit in the bleachers, playing your game while watching an outing of Basicball.

[BONK!]

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: The *Call of Cthulhu* adventure "In Media Res" from *The Unspeakable Oath* #10 (perhaps my first "real" exposure to *Call of Cthulhu*)

(Five stars) "Ba-DOOM"

"Lynch, we did it!"

"Yeah, we did. We just blew the seeds from here to Seattle. I hope your timber company has a lot of **real** big saws. Otherwise, we're in **big** trouble."

Los Huevos Diablos

An adventure for the *Deadlands* RPG

by Dylan Craig

Overview

A group of chicken farmers buy an alchemical feed supplement to increase production. Things start to go wrong, and the Posse gets tangled up in events when the feathers start to fly.

The action starts with the heroes sitting in a café in the town of Damascus, forking their way through their fried-egg lunches. Damascus is a relatively undistinguished little burg; ringed by bare mountains on all sides, it has few industries and fewer attractions. A third-rate copper mine in the area provides most of the employment, and the rest of the town's revenue is skimmed off the steady flow of travelers passing through on their way to some more worthwhile location.

The characters might be in Damascus for a variety of reasons, most of which would involve Damascus' positioning on the main road through the area. Alternately, they may have been performing some duty or other for the copper miners' association -- guarding ore shipments, or ferreting out saboteurs -- and are now waiting in Damascus for their payment to arrive at the association's main office. Alternately, one of their horses may have thrown a shoe (or their stagecoach may have cracked its axle) on the rocky trail through the mountains, and they are waiting for it to be repaired.

Damascus' sole lodging-house is the Golden Guilder, a converted blasting shed on the edge of town run by a Dutch widow. Prices, facilities and service are all rock-bottom. The Guilder doesn't have a bar or kitchen, and is quieter than the town cemetery, so characters without much else to do will spend most of their days at the Boston Café, the town's diner and saloon. The atmosphere in the café is much more convivial than at the Guilder; a steam-powered pianola tinkles away in the corner, and the café staff, while plain, are attentive.

Poached

Among the other customers are a table of four rough-looking men in farmers' clothes, sitting across the room from the Posse. The men are conversing in whispers, and looking around furtively to make sure no-one is within earshot as they do so. As the characters watch [**Cognition roll: TN7**], one of them reaches into his dungarees to shift the handle of a Colt Navy out of the way of his protuberant gut. This fellow has a burlap bag at his feet; over the course of breakfast, as the characters watch, a reddish stain on the underside of the sack develops into a patch of slimy blood, and begins to form a puddle on the floor. Neither the owner of the bag nor his companions seem aware of this fact, although they all make a point of occasionally tapping the bag with their feet to make sure it's still there.

If the characters continue to observe the men, they will see them peering out of the window at regular intervals, scanning the street as if keeping an eye out for someone, or something. Across the road, and visible through the window, are the bank and general store, and the main road up to the mine. The street is deserted apart from a foraging mongrel dog.

There are three other patrons in the café at the time, apart from the Posse: a pair of traveling cutlery salesmen playing poker, and a thin-faced man in greenhorn's clothes and a well-maintained bowler hat who is the town banker. The café has a staff of two: a waitress and the cook. If asked, any of the locals can identify the men as local farmers. They are not regular patrons of the café.

Sunny Side Up

The men are waiting for the snake-oil salesman who sold them the potion to return to town after an overnight stay at the home of the mine owner (to whom he was selling hair-regrowth tonics). They intend to confront him with the contents of the bag: the carcass of one of their roosters, twisted and deformed from an overdose of the potion. However, they don't want anyone else to see the carcass, for fear that nobody will want to buy their produce in the future.

Currently, their plan is to intercept the potioneer as he enters town, and steer him into an alley at gunpoint to "negotiate." While they don't want trouble, they are secretive and angry, and this may mean a confrontation with anyone who gets in their way or asks too many questions.

If the Posse waits to see what happens, the men will spot something out of the window around half an hour later, and they will rise as one, moving hastily towards the door. The man with the gun will grab the bag from under the table without looking at it, and will cast a cautious glance around the café as he does so.

Whether the Posse and the farmers come to blows or not, no fatalities or serious wounds should result. The farmers may wave their single pistol around if the Posse try and face them down, but they will stop short of actually shooting anyone and will back down immediately if their gesture is replied to in kind. Of course, if the Posse stays back and allows the farmers to go through with their plan, they will see the dandily-dressed man's smile turn to an expression of shock as a burly farmer takes him by each arm, and he is led into the alleyway next to the café. Hopefully, the characters will take action at this point (if not before!). Otherwise, the spot chosen by the farmers for their "little talk" might be under the characters' window, allowing them to eavesdrop.

The farmers and the alchemist (stats and names in Boot Hill, below), will initially have little to say to one another beyond accusations and denials. The main points of the conversation, whether the characters are there are not, are as follows:

- The alchemist sold the farmers a potion which was to be mixed with the chicken feed.
- This morning, all the farmers' roosters were dead. They want compensation and a refund.
- The alchemist refuses. There's no way the chickens could have died unless the farmers did something wrong.
- The farmers don't like the sound of this at all, and offer to feed the leftovers of the potion to the alchemist.
- When they brandish the bottle, the alchemist notes that there's almost nothing left. Where's the rest, he asks?
- That's all that was left, say the farmers. Two teaspoons, diluted into two gallons of water, into the chicken feed, and two teaspoons, diluted into a gallon of water, in the water trough -- like he said.
- But, counters the alchemist, there was ten teaspoons' worth in the bottle, and there's less than a quarter over.
- Well, come to think of it, says one, we didn't have any teaspoons. So we used a soup spoon instead.
- But that's an overdose, yelps the alchemist. No wonder they're dead!
- Don't you tell us about chicken farming, city boy, say the farmers. Chickens can take any amount of feed, so they can take any amount of potion. Stands to reason.

Someone (perhaps the characters, and certainly the stray dog mentioned above) may want to examine the contents of the sack before or at this point. The rooster inside presents a terrifying sight; in fact, characters with less than 2 Grit need to make a Fright Check against a Terror Value of 5. The creature has had its neck twisted; its head is elongated and swollen, several patches of skin stand exposed between patchy clumps of feathers, and -- worst of all -- a fleshy lump of flesh like a third leg protrudes from under the tail. The farmers will confirm that almost all of their roosters were in this condition this morning, and several had to be killed.

In lieu of compensation, the alchemist will offer to mix up an antidote to the potion, but he will need to assess the condition of the remaining roosters before he can judge the quantities. He will ask the characters -- especially if some of them are law enforcement or scientific types -- to accompany him, as he doesn't trust the farmers not to beat him up (or worse) once they are out of sight. The farmers, on the other hand, want the party to accompany them because none of them can read and they are worried that the alchemist will try to hoodwink them or escape. They promise the characters a slap-up farm meal and free overnight lodging; the alchemist will compensate them in kind by mixing up some tonics for them. His specialty is animal tonics; he even claims to be able to make a potion that allows horses to

speak for a limited time. Hopefully, between the cajoling of the farmers, the begging of the alchemist, and their own curiosity, the party will set off with the farmers without much prodding. If not, the adventure will come to them after a while, so to speak . . .

Over Easy

The farms are two hours out of town by foot or the farmers' mule-cart, or half an hour on horseback. Situated in a small hollow at the foot of a rocky peak, the farmhouses are clustered together, with the farms spreading out from this central point. Four small sod dwellings, a single double-story barn, and two long wooden sheds housing the pigsties and henhouse make up the farm buildings.

From a distance, all seems normal. Smoke rises from chimneys, and an old hound dog can be seen wandering about the yard looking for a comfortable place to take the latest in a long series of naps. The farmers drive their cart straight up to the henhouse entrance of long shed (the pigsty entrance is on the other side of the building), and dismount, ushering the characters (and the alchemist) inside.

The first thing that strikes the characters is the rows and rows of empty coops; however many chickens used to live here (close to a hundred, if anyone counts), none remain now. Lying scattered around the henhouse are the broken bodies of a dozen roosters; all show the extreme deformities exhibited by the specimen in the sack. Close examination of the bodies [**Cognition TN 9, Medicine: General 7, or Medicine: Veterinary 5**] will show that they have all been pecked to death. Similar examinations of the coops will show that they have all been forced, from the inside. What bare straw remains is foul-smelling and stained with some kind of greenish slime, as if their very contents of the coops had dissolved. The area has a Fear Level of 1.

Note that there are no fresh eggs in the building. Don't mention this specifically . . . reveal this fact only if the Posse asks.

With an oath, one of the farmers mutters, "Geraldine!", and rushes off towards his house. His fellows, with a few murderous glances at the alchemist, follow suit. One has the presence of mind to grab the shotgun from the cart. Their shouts and hollers are met with no response -- indeed, the farmhouses seem deserted.

The following pieces of information can be gleaned from the henhouse and courtyard:

- The farm animals are not only alive, but unharmed. Some, however, seem a little skittish.
- The courtyard is absolutely rotten with chicken tracks. The volume is consistent with several dozen chickens marching up and down the area for at least an hour.
- The barn is empty; the interior trapdoor leading to the loft is closed. The ladder allowing exterior access is nowhere to be seen.

The alchemist, if interrogated, has nothing to contribute to the situation except to say what his elixir was supposed to do: increase body weight and laying speed. He got the recipe from an old European manuscript which he no longer owns, having sold it after transcribing the list of ingredients. It certainly didn't indicate any danger of mutation, and he's sold the same formula to several clients before without any problems. As he is explaining this, a farmer suddenly shouts, from one of the houses, "They're up here!"

The missing families have been found in the back room of one of the houses, barricaded in behind furniture and bolts of cloth. The kitchen of this house reeks of burnt gunpowder, and is missing a large chunk of window and wall. Scattered around the blast points (indicative of the discharge of both barrels of a shotgun) are a few feathers and gobbets of flesh.

The farmers, meantime, are tearing at the barricades; the shouts of those within are too muffled to be heard clearly, but it is certain that some of the voices belong to children and others to adults. The characters may lend a hand at this point; there are 100 points' worth of items blocking the entrance, and each character may remove as many points as the result of a Strength or Nimbleness roll (their choice), per round.

As the last piece of the barricade falls, call for Cognition rolls from everyone. Those inside, working on the barricades, need a 10; everyone else will only need a 5. Successful rolls will alert the characters to a strange susurration, like bats. A round later, the shuttered top entrance to the barn will burst open, disgorging a cloud of feathers and several writhing, flying creatures into the air.

Scrambled

The remaining hens (about a hundred of them, as mentioned above) have been transformed by the ungentle caress of the Reckoner's taint within the potion, into cockatrices: ravenous creatures of legend who have the ability to paralyse those they wound. The barn will disgorge 1-10 of these monsters every round, which will circle the farmstead for a round before diving to the attack. The cockatrices are equally at home in the air and on the ground; they will divide themselves equally between all available targets, preferring to attack those who are out in the open. They will not attack other animals unless they come under attack from them; even the old hound, who will be barking furiously and running in circles at this point, will be unmolested.

Victims of cockatrice poison require a Vigor roll against a TN of 3 to remain mobile. This magical poison affects the Harrowed normally. Each resisted "dose" results in a cumulative penalty of -1 to the Vigor roll, so after the sixth time someone is wounded by a cockatrice, they will be at a -6 penalty to resist the poison's effects. Once the poison has taken effect, the victims gain a -2 penalty to all actions (and movement) every round. When this penalty reaches -10, they are effectively paralysed.

Although the individual hens have a Terror Value of 5, being confronted by more than a handful at once increases this to 7. The Fear Level of 1 applies to the whole farmstead while the cockatrices are flying around.

Several tactics to put the cockatrices down might be employed, but few are likely to succeed simply because of the number of creatures involved. Make a note of where misses from area-effect weapons such as flamethrowers land; they may result in the destruction of the very buildings the characters will find themselves needing to seek cover in as the cockatrices continue their assault. Try to split the party up as much as possible; the best mechanism for this is to have some of the characters or NPCs collapse from the poison, and require rescue. The rescuers can then be cut off by a whirling cloud of cockatrices, and forced to drag their insensate charges into another source of cover. Then, circumstances permitting, split your players up. This will add spice to their breakout plans -- how can they make the other groups aware of what they intend to do?

Careful sniping and inventive use of local resources will allow the characters to gradually wear the cockatrice numbers down, but this might take anywhere from an hour to the rest of the evening. Keep track of expended ammo and keep the Posse on its toes by introducing cockatrices sliding down the chimneys, scratching at the floorboards, and lashing through windows with their powerful, barbed tails. The heroes might also have to stop the farmers killing the alchemist, if both parties made it to the same piece of cover: none of the farmers' family members have been killed (having taken cover after the first cockatrice sally), but two of them are paralysed and the prognosis for everyone else doesn't look too good.

The alchemist's main use, apart from building flasks of Greek Fire, lies in concocting an antidote. This will take a while, but will prove to be effective eventually . . . although paralysed characters will require a few hours to recover fully (losing 3 points of their penalty on the initial application of the antidote, and a further 3 points per hour).

When less than ten cockatrices are left, they will change tactics. Flying off to the north, they will find the egg cache (see below) and lie in wait for any pursuers.

Coming Home To Roost

Once the cockatrices are driven off, the farmers will be more concerned with extracting their families, repairing the damage inflicted on the farmstead, and herding up animals panicked by the fight than with exacting revenge on the

alchemist. The alchemist will be sitting on the doorstep, moaning that he is ruined; he has had to use up almost all his ingredients and glassware in assisting in the fight and the creation of the antidote, and he hasn't made nearly enough on his recent sales to replace these items.

The characters may very well neglect to follow up on the missing eggs and cockatrices, especially if they didn't make the connection between the empty coops and the missing eggs. Astute parties, however, may search the farm to their heart's content without finding the eggs. The old hound, sniffing at a cockatrice corpse, will provide the necessary impetus to broaden the scope of the search, and will bound off to the north into the rocks and scrub, barking wildly and sniffing at the trail. If the heroes follow, they will find that the hound leads them to an old well next to the ruins of an older dwelling further up the mountain. Gummed onto the walls halfway (25 feet) down this well are a clutch of close to two hundred cockatrice eggs.

The remaining cockatrices are lurking at the bottom of the well, and will attack any intruders savagely. Only three cockatrices can attack at a time due to the narrowness of the well. Any area-effect weapons directed down the well (Gatling pistols, dynamite, flamethrowers) will destroy 1d100 eggs with each attack. These eggs are the same size as hen eggs, but reddish-brown in color and remarkably heavy. While they will not hatch without daily contact with the skin secretions of a living cockatrice, their contents may still fetch a decent price from museums and scientific laboratories -- a good guideline would be \$50 for the first egg and \$2.50 for each additional egg, per buyer. Hence, parties who wish to make a good profit off the eggs will need to make a fairly extensive journey to find enough buyers to sell them to . . . although the alchemist's contacts will come in very useful here.

The value of the eggs halves with each week after they were laid. Finding prospective buyers might bring the heroes into contact with all sorts of unlikely types, and lead to several other adventures. And who is to say that one or two of the eggs won't hatch despite their best precautions?

Awards

3 bounty, a white chip for investigating the barn, and a red chip for finding the egg clutch.

Boot Hill

The Farmers:

Butch Burroughs, Matthew and Moses Linkly, and Ezekiel White

Corporeal: 3d6 -- Fightin': Wrasslin 2, Shootin': Shotgun 2

Mental: 1d6 -- Trade: Farmin' 2, Teamster 2, Overawe 2

Quick Hits: 30

Attacks: Pistol, Shotgun, or Hoe (STR+1d4, Defensive Bonus +1)

The Alchemist:

Albert Moynihan

Corporeal: 2d6 -- Quickness 1d10, Vigor 2d4, Fightin': Brawlin 1, Throwin': Unbalanced 4, Dodge 2 **Mental:** 4d6 -- Knowledge 4d12, Alchemy 1d12, Medicine: Pharmacy 2d12, Academia: Occult 2d12 **Quick Hits:** 25 (Scrawny)

Attacks: Thrown vial of acid or explosive -- 2d6 points of explosive damage

The Cockatrices (100)

Corporeal: 1d10 -- Strength 1d4, Fightin': Brawlin 2, Flyin' 2, Dodge 1

Mental: 1d4

Size: 2

Terror: 5

Quick Hits: 10 (but take damage as if they were Harrowed)

Attack: Peck (STR -- 1; can only poison of damage is inflicted), or Tail (STR+1d4)

Designer's Notes: GURPS WWII: Hand of Steel

by Shawn Fisher

An Alternate History for *GURPS WWII*

The original, and much shorter, blurb was written for *GURPS WWII: Hand of Steel*, but playtesters suggested it belonged in the designer notes, so here it is. The basis for this is a campaign I ran for several years. It was inspired by several sources, including a few of Ken Hite's *Suppressed Transmissions*, the *Call of Cthulhu* vignette in *GURPS High Tech*, the original *In Nomine* game and its *GURPS* conversion notes, and several old comic books that I can't remember the names of anymore. In addition, I might add that a good bit of it is based on real history, such as the *real* Sanger orbital bomber, or Himmler's own disturbing occult ramblings (such as an SS priesthood). Recently, alternate World War II products have suddenly come out in force. Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green* (and more recently, *Godlike*), Pinnacle Entertainment Group's *Weird Wars: Blood on the Rhine*, Dream Pod 9's *Gear Krieg*, and Fat Messiah Games' *Hard Vacuum* have all hit the shelves. Fiction in this area includes such excellent reads as Robert Harris's *Fatherland* and the various Harry Turtledove novels. Even PC games, like *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, are cashing in on the phenomenon.

If you've been keeping up with all this, you'll see right where this article is heading. I like to call all of this Panzerpunk.

The Backstory

When Hitler takes charge of Germany in 1933, he puts Albert Speer in charge right away to build the infrastructure and industries necessary to feed his military machine. He also charges Himmler with finding something useful in all that Nazi occultism (see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's *The Occult Roots of Nazism*).

Speer handily chooses to put the Third Reich science in the deft hands of Werner von Braun. After a stunning exhibition of Von Braun's rocketry, Hitler backs the proposed Nazi space program, and Nazi "vakuumflieger" make the first suborbital flights in manned rockets in August of 1939. Shortly after Poland is invaded, the Reich tests its first atomic bomb. Thanks to the foresight and energy of Speer, von Braun, Willy Ley, Eugene Sanger, and others, suborbital spaceplanes are skipping across the upper atmosphere by the spring of 1940.

The Allies do not stand idly by. The British take the lead in Allied rocketry, under the guidance of Frank Whittle and A.M. Low, until the Nazi war machine rolls through the streets of Paris. High-altitude rocket planes of the RAF manage to beat back the Nazi onslaught, but only barely. Russia burns in flames, its Pact of Steel shattered when rocket-powered FW-313 Saengers bomb Moscow into atomic ashes.

The U.S. displays its typical isolationist stance, until Japanese rocket planes sink American battleships, and carriers, at Pearl Harbor. With British support they play catch-up in the Space War; the US Army Rocket Corp has Curtis PX-40s protecting the stratosphere above North America by late 1942.

Warships increase in size and capability as the Space War heats up. Allied and Nazi scientists develop the ultimate brute-force rocketry, the Atomic Drive. Using atomic bombs for fuel, Axis and Allied warships battle each other in the cold vacuum of space, relying on cranky radar and low-tech binoculars to spot each other before a salvo of shells rips through their armored skin. *GURPS Space* meets *GURPS WWII*.

By 1945 the war is being fought all across the inner Solar System. The Moon and Mars are both prizes, and battles for them force men to bleed and die there the same as their earthly counterparts. Transfer orbits between the Earth, Moon, and Mars are the shipping lanes of the Solar System, brimming with heavily laden transports stalked by atomic-propelled warships.

The devastation brought on by the Atomic Age wrecks Earth. Cities are mangled carcasses of concrete and iron. Roads and rail networks are demolished. The U.S. military develops an all-purpose engineering vehicle, the Thug, to help rebuild the shattered countryside. A walking tank with crude arms, the Thug greatly sped up the process of clearing rubble. Soon, however, resourceful GIs mounted weapons on the arms, and welded armor to the cockpit area. Thugs, sometimes called "stalking tanks," or "stanks" (a reference to the smell left inside the cockpit after a few days of continuous use), became frontline vehicles. *Panzerkampfanzug* is what the Nazis called theirs, and they built them by the thousands to support their gargantuan Maus supertanks.

A Deal with the Devil

Reichsfurher Heinrich Himmler's bid for Nazi supremacy comes from a totally different angle. Ahnenerbe (Himmler's mystical research organization, which Spielberg depicted in the *Indiana Jones'* films) finds the answer to their quest: human sacrifice in exchange for all-consuming supernatural power locked in the soul of the Aryan master race. Himmler jumps in with both feet, and in and makes a deal with the Devil. He sacrifices a few Nordic virgins, or whatever, and gets an army of darkness in return. Demons, undead, vampires, long-dead Germanic warriors, black magic, etc. It doesn't matter how, really, just as long as we get undead Nazis. GMs can make great use of *GURPS In Nomine*, *GURPS Spirits*, *GURPS Undead* (Independent Body Parts is a must!), and the *GURPS World of Darkness* titles for this. Stir in *GURPS Black Ops* to taste, just to make things fair for the players.

The disease that the undead carry spreads on to any troops scratched or wounded by the creatures. They arise as undead as well, unless clerical magic is used to stop it. Some areas of the world are completely overrun with undead, such as France and England. Only walled villages and towns that endured the initial onslaught have survived.

Town militias patrol the streets at night with IR-equipped BARs and halftrack-mounted searchlights. Sewer crawls and infested buildings are usually farmed out to mercenary outfits, who kill zombies and get paid by the head, literally. Chaplains with True Faith -- and shotguns -- lead villagers in defense of their homes. Special forces units take on the tough jobs of clearing cities and forested areas. Air support uses lots of napalm. One common creature is the *spinne*. This undead thing has a human head, to which is attached four or more arms from corpses. (The same concept, applied to a rat's head, using human fingers, makes a great surprise for a tank or Thug crew.)

Technology

This is a TL6+1 alternate history. Major differences in TL involve the addition of nuclear power, TL8 HO rockets, and the TL7 Orion drive. Most other gear is TL6. Sensors are limited to radar and sonar. This is important as it allows an element of stealth and stalking in space travel, since radar is one of the easiest sensor technologies to spoof, creating a space-warfare analogy to a submarine game of cat-and-mouse. This makes for exciting play. All vehicles should be created with the vehicle design system in *GURPS WWII*. The new additions include:

Item	VSPs	Wt.	Cost	Power
Arm Motor	1	25	\$18K	3
HO Rocket	0.6	120	\$500	0
Full Life Support	10	1000	\$50	10
Atomic Drive	2K	1.1M	\$1M	0
Atomic Reactor	500	60K	\$40K	0

Each Arm Motor provides a ST 300 motor with the cheap and striker options from *GURPS Vehicles*. For double VSPs, weight, and cost, the arm may have a crude gripper (-4 to DX). The power requirement has been doubled to account for the poor performance of TL6+1 arms. Arm subassemblies should be purchased as non-rotating superstructures, using the Subassemblies Table on p. W127. Note that arms do not require rotation space as it's included in the arm motor volume. For more details, see *GURPS Mecha* and *GURPS Vehicles*. The HO rocket (courtesy of von Braun and Robert Goddard) provides 5,000 lbs of vectored thrust and consumes 7,500 gph HO rocket

fuel per module. HO fuel weighs 2.1 pounds per gallon and costs \$0.2 per gallon.

The Full Life Support module provides oxygen and water for one person indefinitely. It does *not* provide food, however. That should be carried as provisions (\$500, 100 lbs., and 1 VSP of highly nutritious food tablets supplies 300 man-days of sustenance). The Atomic Drive, created by R.J. Oppenhiemer and friends, provides 4 million pounds of thrust per module and consumes 3,600 nuclear bombs per hour. Each bomb costs \$6,000 and weighs 60 pounds. Four such bombs take up 1 VSP, or 900 VSPs per hour of operation.

The Atomic Reactor module provides 5,000 kW of power and lasts for 1 year before needing an overhaul.

See *GURPS Space* for more information on spacecraft and performance calculations, and *GURPS Mars* for information on the Red Planet. Assume that any craft that is towed to 50,000 feet or more on Earth adds 1.5 MPS to its delta-v for purposes of getting into orbit. This is how most non-Atomic Battlesuits make a natural addition to a Panzerpunk campaign. Increase battlesuit control systems and arm motor statistics by 100% to reflect the crude nature of TL6+1 technology.

Personal Gear

Personal weapons and gear haven't changed a lot. If in doubt about availability, consult the Guaranteed Play Balance table (p. CIII10) and pick a few appropriate modifications. TL7-8 items in *GURPS Space*, such as pressure tents, NBC suits, hand thrusters, re-entry kits, and enviro-bubbles can all be used with a simple 50% increase in weight, and 1/10 normal cost. Food tablets should be allowed as-is, however.

- *Duralum Armor*: Also called "soldatplatte" by Nazi troops, this is heavy, articulated aluminum plates reinforced with layers of nylon. The suit has PD 4, DR 7, and includes a helmet, gloves, and boots. The helmet is open-faced, but can be combined with a gas mask and sealed against chemical weapons and fallout (PF 5). \$75, 65 lbs.
- *Geiger Counter*: Used to measure radiation levels. \$50, 4 lbs.
- *IR Goggles*: Active IR viewers allow the wearer to see up to 200 yards at night at half the normal darkness penalties. Any other active IR source, such as IR spotlights, can be seen by the viewer at twice normal range. They are usually mounted to helmets or worn with Duralum armor or space suits. They need 0.01 kW of power. \$50, 5 lbs.
- *Radioisotope Generator*: Provides 1 kW for about 14 years. Useful for recharging batteries or powering radios. DR10, HP30. \$2,000, 200 lbs.
- *Space Suits*: These heavy suits (PD 2, DR 3) are quipped with a reflective surface (PF 5), a waste relief tube, a 1-mile transmitter radio, and two hours of life support. The helmet (PD2, DR4) gives -2 to Vision rolls. \$200, 75 lbs.
- *Flame Launcher*: A disposable, single shot flame device that looks like a 2-foot tube with a pistol grip at one end. It shoots a single shot of flaming petrol. It is most useful for dealing with nests of spinne and other undead from a distance. Malf Crit, Dam 3d (flame), SS 14, Acc 4, 1/2D 25, Max 40, Wt. 7 lbs., RoF 1, Shots 1, Rcl -3, \$25.

Sample Vehicle

Curtiss PX-40 Rocket Plane

Subassemblies: Heavy Fighter Bomber chassis +4, High-Agility Reconnaissance wings +2, 3 retractable wheels +1.

P&P: 10,000-lb. thrust HO rocket with 2,055 gallon ultra-light tanks [Body and Wings].

Occ: 1 CS Cargo: None

Armor F RL B T U

Body 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5

Wing 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5

Wheels 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5

Weaponry: 3x20mm Short Air AC [Body: F] (60 rounds each).*

*All linked to fire at once.

Equipment: Body: 0.5 man-day life support, medium transmitter, large receiver, navigation instruments, 10-mile radar, radar detector, bombsight.

Wings: 1,000-lb. hardpoint each.

Statistics: Size: [LxWxH] 65'x 25'x 15' *Payload:* 6,590 lbs. *Lwt:* 11,957 lbs.

Volume: 608 cf *Maint:* 47 Hrs *Cost:* \$22,437

HT: 10. *HP:* 525 Body, 35 Wings, 50 each wheel.

aSpeed: 765 mph *aAccel:* 21 mph/s *aMR:* 1 *aSR:* 2

Stall Speed: 115 mph.

gSpeed: 362 mph *aAccel:* 18 mph/s *aMR:* 0.25 *aSR:* 4

Ground Pressure Extremely High. No Off-Road Speed.

sAccel 0.94 g, *sDec* 0.94 g, *sMR* 0.94 g

Delta-v is 3.22 MPS.

Design Notes: Full Speed endurance is 21 minutes. Statistics include two 300-gallon HO wing tanks. Routine operation reduces speed to 230 mph (0.28gs), but extends duration to 85 minutes. If towed to an altitude of 50,000 feet by another aircraft, it can reach orbit from the Earth's surface. It can easily make orbit on the Moon and Mars. Repeated re-entry of the Earth's atmosphere can cause the craft to disintegrate!

There's Something Your GM Wants to Tell You

by Jon M. Mollison

Sometimes I wish I was a player. The grass looks so much greener on your side of the screen; you only have one set of statistics in front of you, you only have one person's motivations to rationalize, you get to sit back from time to time, watching another character grill my NPC for a while, and -- best of all -- when the session is over you get to go home to other pursuits. I have to deal with the motivations of dozens of characters. There are reams of papers, maps and notes behind this screen to try and keep straight. I participate in almost every encounter and must know even the most esoteric rules of the game, "just in case." Worst of all, when the session is over, I go home to next week's session.

The Next Session hovers over me all week, like a black cloud, demanding attention. At times I can almost hear it whispering to me; "Tie up this plot thread. How are the NPCs going to react to the current situation? Make sure you understand these rarely used and poorly written rules before the next session. Revise the plot structure, and whip up ten more important NPCs while you're at it." My evenings are spent trying to silence the voice but there is always so much more work to be done.

Don't get me wrong, the work definitely has its rewards. It's nice to see my creations come to life each week. Not being tied to one particular character lets me stretch my role-playing muscles and it's nice not to have to conform to one single world view week in and week out. I enjoy being the center of attention for most of the evening. I absolutely love the look on your faces when I reveal this week's Big Surprise.

It's just that sometimes I wish there wasn't so much work. Sometimes I wish you would do a little more to help. There are all sorts of way you could. If you aren't too busy this week, here are a few things you could do that would help ease my heavy burden, and most of them are pretty fun to do, too.

1. **Design a couple of NPCs with whom your character is likely to interact.** It could be a mother, the guy at the donut shop where your character gets his bagel and coffee every morning, maybe even the high school bully he hasn't seen in a decade. Whatever tickles your fancy. Just write out the basics and pass it on at the beginning of the next session. This one simple task will work wonders for the campaign. It will add countless living people to the world, give you an even greater stake in the outcome, and give me still more plot hooks.
2. **Use your information gathering skills frequently.** As I prepare this week's adventure I'm looking over your character to see what sorts of challenges to throw your way. One of the first things I do when placing important clues is determine how you are likely to find them. If I know that your psychic can intuit the history of an object, you can bet I'll leave a bloody knife at the crime scene. If you forget about your psychic powers how am I supposed to feed you an image of the killer?

In a fantasy setting I'll take advantage of your divination spells, in a modern setting I'll give important information to the weasel snitch that owes you a few favors. But I can't make you use these aspects of your character . . . that part is up to you.

3. **Know when to ask, "Is there a <insert useful item here> nearby?"** We only have so much time in this session, so when I describe a location I only give a brief description of the place and mention those things that set it apart from other, similar places. Of course there's a beer bottle on the bar; you're in a saloon. No, there isn't a painting on the wall of the airliner in which you're traveling.
4. **How many times have we been through this little song and dance?**

Me (as the shopkeeper): That widget you're holding costs fifty bucks.

You: How much is a widget really worth?

Me (thinking your character is asking the shopkeeper): I just told you, fifty bucks.

You: No, how much is a widget really worth?

Me (still not getting it): Get outta my store, you no good punk!

You: Jon, it's a simple question. I don't have my rulebook and I want to check the price before my character starts haggling. I don't think there's any need for you to call me a punk.

This doesn't have to happen, and it won't if you have a method of quickly establishing whether you are talking in character or out of character. This can be visual, (my personal method is to lean to one side and place one hand to my opposite cheek in the classic "stage whisper" pose) or aural (notice how many accents my NPCs have? That's to help you distinguish between them and me.)

It's very easy to confuse things when you ask me questions without some way of differentiating between you and your character. Am I supposed to answer, or is my current NPC? And while we're on the subject of "you or your character," you know those cute little smart aleck comments you like to toss out in the middle of tense negotiations? I have to admit that I think they're pretty funny, too. But when I can't tell whether it's you or your character, I may assume the worst. Which means that smart mouth of yours is going to get your character in deep trouble.

5. **This is the last, and probably most important: tell me what you want.** I'm not a mind reader, so this is the only way I have of knowing how the game is going. If you don't tell me Lord Rothnar wants to go on a quest to find the fabled Blade of Painful Disemboweling, you just might find Tights of Comeliness waiting for you in the Lich-King's basement. I'm going to send you out on one treasure hunt after another until you tell me that you want to do some serious character development with fully fleshed out NPCs (see suggestion 1). Just like in a marriage, the key to keeping everyone happy is communication. You let me know what you (or your character) is looking for, and I'll try to give it to you.

These suggestions weren't too painful, were they? Even if you do just two of these things the benefits will be astonishing!

The world will come alive with new people, places and situations that would never have occurred to me. You'll get to see your creations come to life and actually interact with your characters. You'll have a greater stake in the campaign and enjoy it more because of it. Best of all, with all the extra sleep I'll be getting, you won't have to face a cranky, overworked and surly GM at the next gaming session. With just a bit more effort on your part we can make this the greatest, most enjoyable campaign we've ever had.

Pyramid Review

Seven Strongholds (for d20)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Robin D. Laws

Illustrated by Chris Pepper, Michael Clark, Mike Dutton, David Interdonato, Jennifer Meyer, Steven Sanders

128 b&w pages; \$20.95

Seven Strongholds is another title released under Atlas Games' Penumbra imprint of *d20* sourcebooks and adventures. It presents seven different castles, forts, and defensive locales, created by Robin D. Laws -- the author of numerous RPGS and supplements, including *Rune* and *The Dying Earth RPG*, and more recently, *Robin's Laws of Good Game Mastering* from Steve Jackson Games. Each of the seven entries is designed with the intent that it is easy for the DM to prepare and slip into their own campaign, whether by immediate need or by planned design.

Behind Chris Pepper's cover, *Seven Strongholds* is laid out in the Penumbra house style, and thus up to Atlas Games' usual professional standards. The artwork helps capture the feel of each of the seven locations given in the book, but the maps reduce the book's ease of use. Actually, the maps themselves -- by Rob Lee -- are perfectly all right; it is the labeling that is the problem. Where the maps require numbering, an explanation of these numbers is given only alongside the map and not in the heading for each room description. Thus if the referee is reading these descriptions, they are forced to look at the map key before looking at the map itself. It would be easier if the DM were able to refer back and forth between the map and text without having to look at the key. Of course, the book is backed up with a very useful index that organizes all of the Open Gaming License material into categories for ease of use beyond *Seven Strongholds* itself; if you want a particular trap, wondrous item, or deity, there is no unnecessary thumbing through the pages in the hope of finding it.

All of the entries are arranged in a standard format to make them easy to use. Each chapter opens with a simple description of its stronghold in "At A Glance," before going to examine its Placement, Characters, and The Installation. The final two sections -- Scenes and 'Alternate Versions -- suggests ideas on how a referee can involve their players in that particular location, and how it might be used to fulfill a different purpose in the DM's campaign. All of the characters are unique and interesting . . . even those NPCs that are provided with stats, which is a nice touch.

[SPOILER ALERT]

Seven Strongholds opens with The Barrows. This is a concrete bunker, located in or near a major habitation that caps the entrance to the subterranean world. Hordes of monsters work to break out onto the surface and lay ravage to all around, but a determined troop of Gnomes work hard to prevent this from happening. Although the underworld itself is not detailed beyond the Gnome defenses, The Barrows could sit above a major dungeon within a campaign world. In return for their work, the Gnomes receive a share of the local taxes, but remain on good terms with the locals. Shops have been established at The Barrows entrance, and these serve both adventuring parties on their way into and out of the dungeon below. If a campaign revolves around the exploration of a dungeon in true classic *Dungeons & Dragons* style, this could be used as the starting base for such a game. Alternatively, of course, the Gnomes could just be hiding the fact that the all of the monsters have been killed and are still keeping this a secret to continue raking in those taxes . . .



Castle Briar is a stronghold of Elven legend; now it could be of merely symbolic significance, or still remain as part of the active defenses against the enemies of the Elves. Its current lord, the taciturn G'wairin Enderan, is a warrior of great repute, but in matters of the heart and diplomacy he has little skill. He is wary of any that might be a rival, but will not act unnecessarily against them. The castle is actually more interesting than the occupants, as it is actually an enormous living briar. Floors, walls, and ceilings are made up of the thorny bush, which can respond to defend itself or follow the orders given by an Elf with correct password.

Particularly miserable -- not only in its location and condition, but also in its occupants -- is Gloom Keep. They would rather not have to welcome visitors, and if they have any, welcoming is the last thing they will be! They are worshippers of the forgotten god, Hustalen the Protector, once known as the Hammer of Law. Though the dreary deity has his adherents, there are only a few that go forth to convert others to his faith and of those that do return to Gloom Keep, few remain. Hustalen's encroaching age and senility completely pervades the castle, from attitude of his faithful to the odor of his micturition. As written, there really *is* a god withering away upstairs . . . but alternatively, Hustalen might be malign rather than strictly lawful. In which case, the guardians could be protecting the outside world from him, rather than the reverse, or even just nurturing his return . . .

In Old Mound Fort, the author turns the stereotype of the chirpy, friendly Halfling firmly upon its head. A band of Halfling adventurers have restored an old iron-age ditch-and-rampart fort in order to support adventuring parties who have come to delve the ruins of a past civilization that lie all around it. Yet these Halflings are of a mercenary bent and as the fort is only refuge for miles around, can charge what they want for their services. Their desire for gold goes much further in that they also prey upon returning parties, disposing the bodies in a rather gruesome manner.

More traditional is Steelface Point, a Dwarven stronghold that blocks the mouth of a mountain pass. Before it is a wide plain, home to goblinoid hordes that regularly drag their increasingly accurate war machines to smash the fortress, so they can sweep through the pass and into the civilized lands beyond... This imposing defense is not constructed of stone, but of riveted steel and it relies upon magical fire-throwing devices called "Lions of War" to stave off the regular attacks. Though it has stood for many decades, Steelface Point has reached a point of crisis. The hordes have become more accurate, and more importantly, the resident wizard has been killed recently; without him, the "Lions of War" cannot be recharged . . . Perhaps relief from the lands that it protects is on the way to Steelface Point, or perhaps a PC wizard can be persuaded to stay and help -- along with his compatriots, of course.

Probably the most interesting stronghold in this book is The Perch, a domed cliff top lair that is home to a new race of birdmen, known as the Psittae. Jealously status conscious, fervently territorial, and disdainful of those humanoids that simply walk, the Psittae oppress the local population into providing them with food and occasionally labor for those jobs that they are unable to do (or just find too distasteful). All aspects of their society are covered, including religion, reproduction, and their attitude towards their own guano . . . (The fact that they perch in their huts and not on the floor means that should any characters find themselves within The Perch, they will find it rather messy under foot!)

The final stronghold is Uthront's Fort, a rough and ready, recently built motte-and-bailey castle commanded by a Half-Orc looking to be the founder of his own little kingdom. Uthront possesses a magical breastplate that allows him to learn new feats beyond those allowed by his current level . . . and that includes several new ones such as "Killing Strike," which allows the user a greater chance of taking down an opponent to -10 hp and graphically describe their method of despatching them. This location looks at a group of "evil" humanoids that have more than pillage and burn as their motive, but while Uthront might have visions of a glorious kingdom with himself at the reigns, the suggested alternate version actually examines a potential history for the new country. Essentially it is doomed, as the kingdoms of men will not allow such an Orc state to exist, but this does give Uthront's Fort the potential for long-term use.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Like all Penumbra products, *Seven Strongholds* gives the referee lots of useful material that they can add to their campaign. This not only includes each of the forts and castles, but new additions to the Open Gaming License in the form of feats, skills, creatures, gods, and traps (including a "Quick & Dirty Trap Generator" to be found in The Barrows). Each of the entries in *Seven Strongholds* is useful in one way or another, though it is The Barrows and Uthront's Fort that really spring to mind as being good for kicking off a campaign. Most interesting though, has to be

The Perch, with its new race and comprehensive description of their society and how they interact with the surrounding population.

While *Seven Strongholds* may not be as immediately useful as, say, the Penumbra encounter anthology *En Route*, there is much to be made of these forts if the referee has the time to sit down and prepare.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Floorplans by Brian K. Moseley: Inns & Taverns, Castles & Keeps, Temples & Shrines

Published by RPGNow.com

Written and drawn by Brian K. Moseley

GIFs of various sizes, with HTML pages to link to them; \$5 each

These are packs of non-system-specific floorplans for (depending on the package) taverns (15) and inns (20), castles and keeps (5, total), or temples, churches, and shrines (30 total, plus thumbnails on 30 deities). (There's also a sample keep and three sample taverns and inns, available at www.darkfuries.com; these are not repeated. One can also find two more sample castles at Moseley's [old Geocities site](http://old.Geocities.site), though that site's lifespan is problematic. The sample church at rpgnow.com *is* repeated in the actual product.)

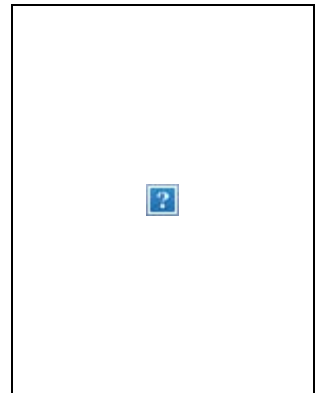
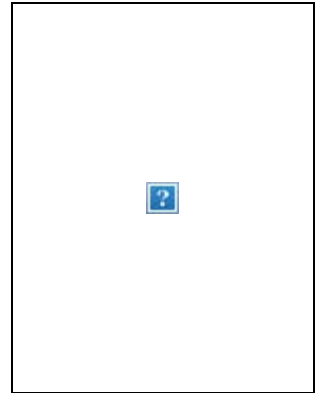
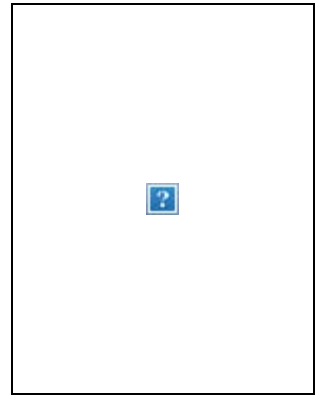
The floorplan sets are primarily available as Electronic Software Downloads (ESD) from rpgnow.com, but RPGNow will also put your material on CD-ROM or paper for a slight additional cost. They come with HTML (and thumbnails), enabling one to view them with one's favorite browser. (More importantly, from my point of view, it also allows me to customize the names -- or even add more maps -- trivially! For instance, I've already put the sample inns, taverns, and castles into the table of contents file.)

Each of these are black and white line-art (GIFs), drawn as a top-view onto a dotted-line grid which gives the scale: 5 feet per square. The art includes beds, chairs, church pews, statues, wall hangings, barrels and crates, privies, and basically everything that doesn't move. Secret doors, if any, are noted, as are defenses such as murder holes and the like, primarily in the castles. I have not printed these out yet, but they look like they would be clear and -- mostly -- not too big for an average-sized page. (The inns, taverns, and many of the churches would be fine; the keeps and castles would probably be too large unless shrunk.)

No fancy deathtraps are included, or magical amenities; these are floorplans you can use for a mostly realistic setting without altering. (If you have a high-magic setting, you'll need to add things such as Apportation-based dumbwaiters, Cold Boxes for food storage, and No Magic zones in dungeon areas.) There are no "what players see" maps, though -- secret doors are clearly marked. To make a player map will require a little work in a drawing program that reads GIFs. Remember to save a copy of the original first!

The *Inns & Taverns* ESD is the first of the floorplans series, and the one with the fewest frills. There's a Floorplan Legend link, showing common images for various things . . . but from there, you're on your own. (Fortunately, the images are clear enough to figure out what's what, with the exception of Inn 003, which either has a *huge* fireplace, or a stage. I named the Inn "The Stage" to remind me of my choice.) Most of the inns are multi-story, and several of the taverns are as well. Two of the Inns are especially unusual, one being a tree-based dwelling and the other carved into a cliff. (And no, the Inn on the Bluff does not have exterior doors; I asked Brian Moseley about that, though I forgot to ask him about the Stage, having already determined what *I* wanted to have be the case.)

Likewise, there are two unusual taverns: one in an old Lighthouse, and the other on a pier. Even if you never need to



describe an inn or tavern down to the detail which these floorplans allow, you'll have a good idea the major parts you'll be sketching out to your players should they wander into one. (And the tree and cliff inns might provide inspiration -- as they did for me -- for unusual settings in general, to spice up your adventures.)

Castles & Keeps, the second ESD, adds an Alcove Illustration -- arrow-slit designs for each stronghold -- as well as a glossary of terms used (a donjon is not a dungeon, and a gallery is not necessarily full of art) and descriptions of the various rooms which will pop up in another window in your browser. I have not researched castles or keeps enough to know whether these are heavy on historical accuracy, but they seem well-thought-out. There are servant and guard quarters, cesspits, interior stables, and the keeps have quarters for fletchers, blacksmiths, and the like. My only quibble would be that there might not be enough room for local villagers to move within the walls in time of siege, though putting enough courtyard space for that would probably make the maps unmanageably large. At the least, they are *plausible* -- and for most games, that's perfectly fine. Two of the floorplans are towers (one with ten levels!), suitable for isolated guard-posts or wizardly homes.

The most recent EST, *Temples & Shrines*, has both descriptions of various shrines (4), chapels (15), temples (8), churches (2), and a cathedral (1) -- and a thumbnail description of 30 fantasy deities. Each map details a place of worship for one of those fantasy gods. Some are very simplistic, such as the shrines of Tayne and Ul'ty, while the hidden Church of Huthunic has two underground levels, as well as the two stories of the legitimate businesses and homes aboveground -- and the Church of Eteris is entirely hidden within a sewer system! (The entire sewer system isn't detailed; just the parts the church is in.)

Since each one is devoted to one of the included gods, some are inappropriate for a non-fantasy god . . . either an included one, or one which is equivalent. However, the majority of the floorplans are easily convertible to a more traditional chapel affiliation (such as one will want for a *GURPS Yrth* campaign). There are no mosques, alas; the niche of historically-accurate, gameable floorplans is still open.

Forthcoming at the time of this review is *Mansions & Manors*, which will add color images as well as black and white maps, player and GM maps, and *d20* system characters included (with portraits, so you can tell your players, "He looks like this!"). From the thumbnail samples, this looks like at least one of the buildings is nearly as big as the towers from *Keeps & Castles*.

If you're a map-junkie, these are great value just on their own. If you're running a modern campaign, you'll probably want to look elsewhere, so far (though *Mansions & Manors* might change that!); the inns and taverns could be adaptable to hotels and bars, but it will take a bit more thought, while the churches would need restrooms and children's rooms, and the castles are basically out-dated. Likewise, futuristic settings would require a certain anachronism make the best use of the floorplans (though the taverns could work well for spaceport bar-hostels). But if you're running a straight fantasy campaign, each and every one of these products will have floorplans that find a home somewhere in your world.

--Elizabeth McCoy

Pyramid Review

Lone Stars: The Texas Rangers (for Deadlands & Deadlands d20)

by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Christopher McGlothlin, M.Ed.

\$20.00

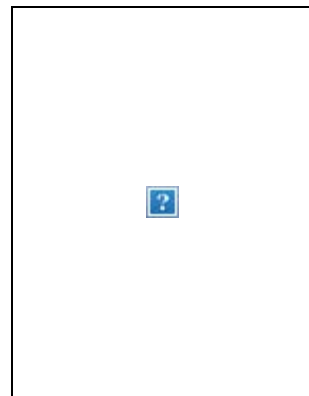
Lone Stars: The Texas Rangers, written by Christopher McGlothlin, continues Pinnacle Entertainment Group's high-quality output. Detailing the resources, organization, and resources of the Texas Rangers and the Confederate Chaplains Corp, *Lone Stars* provides players and Marshals alike with all the information they will need to make these organizations a part of their campaign. Those who are already have Texas Rangers or Blessed Chaplains in their posses will find this book especially useful, as it will provide additional depth and opportunities for players and Marshals while not unleashing any unexpected surprises that will require extensive reworking of their campaigns. The formatting of the book is especially user-friendly, allowing it to be integrated into a game as a prop as well as a sourcebook.

Lone Stars, like most *Deadlands* supplements, is divided into three sections. The first of these sections is written in the form of the Ranger Bible, providing player characters with the history, command structure, and regional commanders of the Texas Rangers. Also included is all the information that the Texas Rangers have about the horrors that populate the Weird West. This presentation of the information allows player characters to use the sourcebook as a resource during play, looking up potential contacts and strategies. Marshals need not worry about players getting too much information, though, as some of the entries are out of date or incorrect, representing the limitations of the Texas Ranger's knowledge.

One of the welcome mechanics for determining how much information and which resources are available to player character Rangers is the Rank and advancement system. Using a system of merits and demerits to control the access to higher ranks, McGlothlin provides Marshals with a simple system for determining the rate of advancement of a player in the Texas Rangers. Given that access to the resources and knowledge of the Rangers is limited by rank, this is important. Indeed, since the section of the Ranger's Bible that details the horrors of the west is only available for Majors and above, these rules are more than just another statistic.

Lone Stars details the material resources available to Rangers in five pages, although they are referred to elsewhere. These resources run from the common version of the Ranger's Bible and Badge issued to all Rangers, through items like the LeMat Undertaker and Bowie Survival Knife, to the Congreve Rocket Battery. This is, of course, significantly shorter than the equipment section found in *The Agency: Men in Black Dusters*, representing the less technological approach taken by the Texas Rangers. The combat maneuvers, which take up an equal amount of space, reinforces this point. These maneuvers are a combination of the traditional western roundhouse punches, flying tackles, and moves employed by the Rock and Hulk Hogan on pay-per-view wrestling matches. Each must be learned and purchased (1 point during character creation and 2 bounty points each after character creation). As in all new *Deadlands* supplements, *d20* stats and equivalent are given for all equipment and maneuvers.

The Confederate Chaplains Corp is also briefly covered in this book. While no new Blessed powers are provided here, there are rules on how to integrate chaplains into your campaign; also provided are some very minor relics for their use. The information on the Shootist, although it duplicates a great deal of material from elsewhere, is a welcome update of the Hexslinger Arcane Background. McGlothlin tweaks, improves, and expands the hexes for this class and clears up a number of questions and inconsistencies distinguishing Shootists from Hucksters. Players interested in this



class will find this section alone worth the price of the book.

There are a handful of small printing and proofreading errors in *Lone Stars*, although they are not sufficient in number to be much of a distraction. The artwork is of universally high quality, although many of the pictures have already appeared in earlier Pinnacle publications.

[SPOILER ALERT]

The Marshal's section of the book expands on the information presented in the posse's section of the book, and provides information on several new creatures specific to the regions detailed previously, including the Burning Dead - Walkin' Dead from the flaming ruins of post-*Dead Presidents* Richmond. This bit of information (and the references to the outcome of *Dead Presidents*) fixes the timeframe of the book. Marshals who are running a campaign set earlier should read the player section carefully, making certain that it does not contain information which will spoil their future plans. Marshals should also be aware that *Lone Stars* references several other *Deadlands* supplements . . . especially regional sourcebooks like the two *Back East* books.

If you have no interest in including the Texas Rangers in your *Deadlands* campaign, whether it is based on Pinnacle's original system, the *d20* system, or the new *GURPS Deadlands* rules, this book will provide little for you. If you *are* interested on how the Rangers work, where they can be found, and how they fight their opponents, you will enjoy this well-written book and find it a useful addition to your gaming library.

--*Matthew M. DeForrest*

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Interior and Terminal Ballistics for *GURPS*

by Douglas Hampton Cole

Ever had a player who wanted his *Black Ops* character to tote around some obscure or fictional piece of artillery that he'd read about in a back issue of a science fiction magazine? Or a player who wanted his Old West character to carry a lever action rifle and a revolver with the same ammunition? How about players who want to cut down a revolver or rifle to make it more easily concealable? In some campaigns, players ask for some very oddball pieces of equipment now and again.

Presented here is a method for taking some real-world information and converting it into *GURPS* damage. It also presents a slightly new way of looking at special ammunition types, and revisits the blow-through rule, giving it a nudge towards the realistic by making blow-through vary with a projectile's wounding potential. Finally, it provides a formula for estimating the kinetic energy (KE) imparted to a projectile given some real-world parameters.

Interior, Exterior, and Terminal Ballistics

Interior ballistics refers to everything that happens in a firearm from the moment the striker hits to the moment the bullet leaves the barrel. For TL5-7, this involves black powder or nitrocellulose powder expanding in a firing chamber, and then accelerating a projectile down a tube. For *Ultra Tech* projectiles, it might involve magnetic acceleration. We can even generalize the issue by claiming that "interior ballistics" can be stretched to include the force a bowstring exerts on an arrow, and cover TL3-4 missile weapons as well.

In all cases, the propellant is applying a force to the projectile over a certain distance (or draw length, for the case of bows and crossbows). Simple physics states that force applied over distance equals energy. If we turn that into kinetic energy by using the equation $F \cdot x = \frac{1}{2} mv^2$, we can determine the final velocity of the projectile, which is where interior ballistics ends, and exterior ballistics begins.

Once the projectile leaves the weapon, Sir Isaac takes over and we could calculate a trajectory. However, all of this is (usefully) abstracted into a skill roll in *GURPS*, which is far simpler. It is worthy of note, though, that with some knowledge of how the velocity of a projectile degrades with distance, you would not have to employ the mechanic of the $\frac{1}{2}$ Damage range . . . you would simply solve for the projectile velocity at the target range, recalculate damage based on the final velocity, and roll some dice. That would require a computer to be used at the gaming table . . . some do it, but it's certainly not for everyone! Once the bullet arrives at its target, exterior ballistics ends.

While there is probably no more controversial subject in firearms literature than the effects that bullets have on people and animals, for gaming purposes the questions are fairly simple: how much armor can the projectile penetrate, and what does it do to the target once it gets through all that armor? That's terminal ballistics, and for gaming purposes, we're going to assume that projectiles do two things. First they penetrate defenses, and then they penetrate flesh, causing a wound as they do so.

Modeling the penetration of armor is actually not that hard. Penetration of solid objects tends to scale with the kinetic energy (KE) of the impactor divided by its cross sectional area (Xsect). In *GURPS*, DR scales linearly with thickness (in reality protection scales with the square of thickness), so at the very least our model will scale armor penetration ability with the square root of KE/Xsect. However, in order to maintain consistency with the vast majority of *GURPS* published material out there, we have to make some modifications to that scaling. We need to assume three things:

1. The 585 Joule 124 grain 9mm NATO standard cartridge is fixed at 2d+2 damage, the value given in *GURPS Basic* and *High Tech*
2. The .50 BMG is accurately recorded in *Vehicles 2^{ed}* as 13d+1 (equivalent to an average penetration of about DR 46.5, or 17mm of steel armor)

3. The penetration of a .30-06 should be roughly halfway between the 9mm and .50 BMG (hopefully matching the 7d+1 listed in *GURPS High Tech*).

Re-scaling the penetration figure to fit currently published *GURPS* stats may not be elegant, but in the end it will mean that fewer tweaks need to be made in existing campaigns. Chalk another one up to "playable abstraction!"

This article will deal with terminal ballistics first, proceed to ignore exterior ballistics, and then return to interior ballistics for those who just have to modify their .357 magnum to have an 18" barrel, or design an archer who can pull a 200lb longbow.

Icky Equations: Penetration Of Armor

The damage formula for armor penetration is

$$\text{Damage (points)} = \sqrt{\text{KE}^{1.04} / \text{Xsect}^{0.314}} / 13.3926$$

where KE is expressed in joules and Xsect is in square meters. Convert this value to dice by dividing by 3.5 and converting the remainder to "adds" by taking the decimal remainder, multiplying by 3.5, and dropping all fractions. This would convert damage of 13 points to 3d+2. Alternately, you can try to divide damage by either 3.5 or 7, and pick which is more satisfying, 13 being (approximately) 3d+2 or (exactly) 4d-1.

Example: We want to determine the penetration of a new 7mm (cross section equals $p \times (\text{Bore}^2) / 4 = p \times (.007\text{m})^2 / 4 = 38.5 \times 10^{-6}$ square meters) TL8 assault rifle. It fires a projectile with a KE of 3600 joules (a 10 gram bullet at 848.5m/s). The formula gives it a damage value of $\sqrt{(3600^{1.04}) / (38.5 \times 10^{-6})^{0.314}} / 13.3926 = 26.0$ points. This converts to 7d+1 of damage with 0.5 points left over, which we drop. The base penetration of this round is 7d+1.

Armor Piercing Rounds

All bullets are not created equal. Some are designed to penetrate solid objects more effectively than others. This can be accomplished two ways: either with a very high energy and low cross section (such as using ammo with a discarding sabot) or by constructing the bullet out of special materials. The penetration value above assumes the bullet is constructed out of a copper or mild steel jacket wrapped around a lead core. Bullets which feature a hardened steel cap, or with tungsten or depleted uranium penetrators, will punch through armor more effectively given the same energy and cross section. Use the following armor divisors with this system:

- Steel cap, reinforced core, or semi-armor piercing: 1.25
- Tungsten or tungsten carbide core: 1.9
- Depleted uranium (DU) core or penetrator: 2.4

The rules are as usual; the armor divisor reduces DR, but also reduces damage by the same amount (see *Using the Rules in Play* for a modification). This represents a bullet that penetrates farther without destabilizing or fragmenting. Do not use an armor divisor of less than one for expanding bullets, such as soft lead (LRN), soft point (SP), or jacketed hollow point (JHP). These are treated below.

Example: Our TL8 7mm battle rifle can fire special AP bullets at the same energy but with a tungsten core (the bullet will be heavier and slower). The damage is still 7d+1, but with an armor divisor of 1.9, written 7d+1(1.9). It will lance through more than 49 points of armor on an average roll!

Special Rule: Armor piercing sabot ammunition no longer merely adds +1 damage per die. Rescale the penetration figure based on the actual diameter of the penetrator. As a rule of thumb, a tungsten round with 48% of the base bore diameter with equivalent KE to the original round will duplicate the performance of APS from p.UT18. Sabot rounds are commercially available today, with a .223 projectile fired from a .308 case at over 4000 feet per second (7d)!

Example: Our opponents, the Evil Grey Aliens have beefed up their Energy Cloth by some SuperScience, and are sporting DR of near 70! Since our Black Ops still need to kill them, we issue 7mm APS ammo with a DU penetrator that's still 3600 joules, but is only 3mm in diameter. The math now works out to about 34 points of damage, giving us $9d+2(2.4)$, capable of penetrating about DR80. The only good Grey is a dead Grey . . .

More Icky Equations: Wound Channel And Blow-Through

Taking the above formula to its logical extreme, we'd all be firing hypervelocity DU needles. These will have extremely high armor penetration, and yield very impressive numbers. A 1.5x30mm steel gauss needle with 1600 joules of KE will clock in with $7d+3$ of penetration, much more effective than an M16 projectile of the same energy (5d).

We're still safe from the Munchkins, however. Once you've gotten through all that armor, you still have to leave your mark on the target. That mark is the wound channel.

Bullets cause damage by disrupting tissue, plain and simple. The old rule of thumb still holds: All other things being equal, make a big hole. While tiny projectiles might have the penetration advantage, they also don't cause large wounds (there are exceptions . . . see below!).

The wound channel modifier is what is used to scale the penetration ability with a projectile's ability to injure the target. The wound channel is given a figure of merit describing the average points of damage the round would do penetrating all the way through the torso. It is proportional to the momentum of the projectile multiplied by its effective cross-section, scaled to give our 9mm "reference bullet" a wound channel modifier of 1.0, preserving the core of the **GURPS** rules.

$$\text{Wound Channel Damage (points)} = MV \times X_{\text{sect}} \times 26,220$$

where momentum is expressed in $\text{kg} \times \text{m/s}$, and X_{sect} is again expressed in square meters. To calculate the Wound Channel Multiplier, use the following equation:

$$\text{WCM} = \sqrt{[\text{Wound Channel Damage} / \text{Penetration Damage}]}$$

Don't include the armor divisor in your penetration equations. Note that you'll need to know the mass and velocity of the projectile, and this might require some extra work to derive it for oddball projectiles. The wound channel modifier is *exactly* the same as the bullet size modifier in **GURPS High Tech**, and is used in place of that figure.

Example: We're back to the 7mm DU APS round we gave our Black Ops. After some math, we decide the penetrator is a 3mm DU rod with an 11.7:1 aspect ratio (so it's equal in length to the original full-size round) which has a mass of 3.17 grams and a velocity of 1505 m/sec (!). Entering this information into the WCM formula, we get Wound Channel Damage = $(.00317\text{kg} \times 1505\text{m/sec} \times 7.1 \times 10^{-6} \text{ m}^2 \times 26,220) = 0.9$ points, and the $\text{WCM} = \sqrt{(.9/34)} = 0.16$, which we round to 0.2. The round that is so capable of punching holes through armor will average about 5.5 points of damage per hit. What's going on? It's reality, sort of. Small holes cause small wounds, all other things being equal.

Wound Ballistics: A Quick Primer

Note the asterisk in X_{sect} , though. That's our first hint that all other things are not equal. When a bullet strikes a viscous medium like soft tissue, it will do two things. First, it carves out a "permanent wound channel" which is the volume of tissue physically disrupted by the path of the bullet. For low velocity bullets, this crush cavity is the primary mechanism of wounding. The second thing bullets do is create a temporary wound cavity, which *usually* doesn't contribute to wounding.

The WCM listed above assumes implicitly that the bullet travels straight through the target without changing its point-first orientation. For pistol bullets, this is mostly correct. For "spitzer or long ogive" shaped bullets (rifle bullets), this

is not even close to true. The point forward orientation is metastable in air, and unstable in flesh. The bullet wants to reorient itself inside your body (ow!) to travel base first. This can vastly increase the effective cross section of the projectile, as the bullet is actually traveling sideways for a while. To what extent bullets "tumble" like this is primarily a function of velocity; bullets above about 600m/sec can be counted on to do this (eventually) with high reliability. To correct for this factor, we add a bit of complexity and take a weighted average of the head-on and tumbling cross section:

$$X_{sect}^* = (1-V/600) \times p(\text{Bore}/2)^2 + V/600 \times \text{Bore}^2 \times (\text{Aspect Ratio})$$

Where aspect ratio is the length to bore ratio of the projectile, and if V is greater than 600m/sec, set V = 600.

Example: We reconsider the 7mm APS cartridge from above, replacing the smaller value of the projectile cross section with the "tumbling" cross section of $(0.003m \times 0.003m \times 11.7) = 105.3 \times 10^{-6} m^2$. This increases the WCM to 0.6, making the round three times more effective as if we didn't include this correction.

Example: A .45ACP pistol fires a 230 grain FMJ bullet at 245m/sec, with an aspect ratio of about 1.5. The penetration equation gives us a base damage value of 7.6 points (2d), and the corrected X_{sect}^* provides us with a WCM of 1.3. This is written in curly brackets, as 2d{1.3}.

Note that the WCM for the .45 is close to the generic bullet size modifier suggested in *High Tech*, and is used exactly the same, with one exception noted in the section on *Using the Rules in Play*.

Additional Complications: Expanding and Fragmenting Rifle Bullets

GURPS Compendium II (p. CII55) presented the option to players that allowed them to increase the effective damage of their weapons by loading hollow point or expanding ammunition (don't hold this against them . . . U.S. police agencies do this too, with good reason). Hollow point and other expanding ammunition can be handled in this rules expansion very simply: replace the cross-section in both the penetration and wound channel calculations with the expanded cross section of the bullet. Most well designed hollow points expand 1.5-2× on striking tissue (a rule of thumb of 1.66 is a good one, although soft pointed rifle bullets are designed to give about a 2× expansion). Do *not* apply the bullet tumbling correction. This will reduce the effective penetration of the round, but greatly increase the final wound. This is realistic; most JHP ammunition tends to be higher velocity than their FMJ cousins to offset this fact.

Example: We load our .45ACP with 230 grain jacketed hollow point bullets at the same velocity as the factory load: 245m/sec. The bullet expands to 1.66x its original diameter (0.747"). As a result, the X_{sect} value changes to $282.7 \times 10^{-6} m^2$, changing both the penetration to 6.5 points (1d+2) and WCM to 2.0(!). If we used the higher velocity JHP at 259m/sec, we edge over the line and eke out 1d+3{2.1} from this round.

The last form of complication is something particularly ugly that happens when a high velocity rifle bullet yaws in an elastic medium. Sometimes, during the time the bullet is traveling sideways, it cannot handle the stress and fragments . . . sometimes *badly*. The M16 (5.56×45mm) cartridge is noted for this effect below a range of 200m or so, as are the Yugoslav versions of the AK-47 round (7.62×39mm) and the West German 7.62x51mm (.308) round. These fragments lance through the wound area that is forming the temporary stretch cavity, literally creating perforations that turn what is typically a fairly harmless effect into a grotesque nightmare of a wound. This is primarily a function of bullet construction and velocity, and is allowed at GM discretion. Multiply the second half of the X_{sect}^* equation by the velocity of the bullet (in m/sec) divided by 360, so the equation reads:

$$X_{sect}^* = (1-V/600) \times p(\text{Bore}/2)^2 + (V^2)/216,000 \times \text{Bore}^2 \times (\text{Aspect Ratio})$$

Note that the destabilization which causes this yaw is *not* present in fin-stabilized projectiles, only spin-stabilized ones. If a projectile is described as APFSDS, don't allow this. This means that typically flechette shotgun rounds will probably *not* be as lethal as the marketing and sales folks would have you believe!

Example: Our fiendishly clever Tech Ops have modified our 7mm DU APS ammo to not only penetrate, but introduced a structure that fragments as it yaws. The wound cross section during yaw is increased by a factor of $(1505\text{m/s})/360 = 4.18$, for a net X_{sect}^* of $440.4 \times 10^{-6} \text{ m}^2$. The damage is now $9d+2(2.4)\{1.3\}$, increased from $9d+2(2.4)\{0.6\}$.

Example: The M16 fires the M193 projectile, a 3.6 gram (55 grain) projectile at about 990m/sec with an aspect ratio of 3.95. This projectile is known to fragment badly upon striking soft tissue. The damage for this round is $5d+1\{1.3\}$.

Example: That Ultra Tech gauss needler fires a 1.5mm steel projectile with 1600 joules of KE. We decide on an aspect ratio of 40 this time, and a mass of 1.35 grams (if you treat the needle as a cylinder you can derive the mass by setting the density of the needle to $7,860 \text{ kg/m}^3$, the density of steel). The velocity of such a projectile is 2392 m/sec. If the needle doesn't fragment (or melt!), it will do damage equal to $7d+3\{0.3\}$, yielding an average of 9.3 points of damage (equivalent to $3d-1$) per needle assuming an unarmored target. The 1.5mm gatling needler (p. UT2 53) is listed as a 4d weapon; perhaps we have an lower-powered needle rifle here?

Interior Ballistics, Revisited

The critical data needed to calculate the terminal ballistics of a projectile are its diameter, mass, velocity, and aspect ratio. But what about how you accelerate that projectile to that velocity?

For firearms, a round of ammunition consists of a propellant and an accelerated mass (it could be a discarding sabot, a bean bag, or shot pellets as well as a single full-bore bullet). That propellant, when detonated, fills the barrel behind the bullet (beginning with the initial starting point for the round, called the chamber) with a certain pressure. For simplicity, we can say that the explosion instantly reaches its maximum pressure, and begins to accelerate the bullet down the barrel. The maximum pressure is maintained for a short period of time as the propellant completes burning, and then falls off (the system is now a piston being pushed by a pressurized gas). With a little work, you can calculate the energy imparted to the accelerated mass during its trip down the barrel, and convert that directly (albeit approximately) into kinetic energy. Without too much more explanation, the formula is:

$$\text{KE (joules)} = P \times \{D \times A + V \ln [(A \times L/V) + 1]\} \times 6896$$

P is the max pressure in the chamber in psi,

D is the burn distance, the distance in meters the max pressure lasts,

A is the bore area, equal to the barrel cross-section (sq meters),

V is the fall-off volume, equal to the chamber volume plus the volume of the barrel when the powder completes its burn,

L is the acceleration length, typically equal to the length of the bore less the burn distance. The overall barrel length is usually quoted including the chamber, so the acceleration distance for most weapons is actually the barrel length minus the burn distance, minus the case length, plus the bore diameter, because bullets are usually seated in the cartridge by about that much.

Rules of Thumb

Max Pressure: Shotguns: 11,000psi; TL6 era autoloaders (like the .45ACP): 15-20,000 psi; Modern pistols: 30-40,000 psi; military rifles: 50-55,000 psi; machineguns and autocannon: up to about 60,000psi

Burn distance: about 7/24 the case length for handgun cartridges, 7/16 the case length for rifles.

DISCLAIMER: DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME! IF YOU USE THESE RULES OF THUMB TO RELOAD AMMO, YOU'LL GET YOURSELF KILLED.

Example: The .45ACP (11.43x23mm) operates at 17,500 psi from a 127mm barrel (acceleration distance 108.7mm). The bore area and chamber area are both the same, as the cartridge is not bottlenecked. The fall-off volume is calculated at $1.581 \times 10^{-6} \text{ m}^3$. The burn distance is estimated at $7/24 * 23 = 6.7\text{mm}$. The final KE for the round is 466.2 joules, which will propel the standard 230 grain cartridge just shy of 250m/sec. That's right in the ballpark! The damage for this round is $2d+1\{1.3\}$

Example: We decide to take that same cartridge and launch it out of a 304.8mm (12") submachine gun barrel. How much damage will it do? We only need increase the acceleration distance by $304.8 - 127 = 177.8\text{mm}$ to 286.5mm. The predicted energy is 630.6 joules, yielding 291m/s and $2d+2\{1.4\}$ damage.

Example: Let's bend the system. We take a 23 gram wooden arrow, and apply a "pressure" of 1000psi. We use an 8mm diameter, an aspect ratio of 95:1, and a "barrel length" and "burn length" of 480mm (for a 760mm arrow); the case length we set at 1mm (it's irrelevant). This converts to about a 78lb draw weight, and propels the arrow at 121 m/sec, inflicting $1d+1$ damage. Not bad! A 120 lb bow (1560psi) with the same properties would inflict $1d+2$, firing the arrow at 151m/sec. Medieval bows were quite strong; it's not unrealistic to assume a 120lb bow, and the damage matches up very well for a longbow that requires ST15 to pull (a Thrust of $1d+1$). The predicted velocities are a bit high compared to reality, but the predicted damages work well with GURPS canon material.

Wound Channel Modifier and Blow-Through

The wound channel modifier can be used to augment or eliminate the "blow-through" rule that states that damage done after HT to the torso is lost. This allows more damaging bullets to cause more severe wounds.

Optional Rule 1: The wound channel modifier also defines the blow-through modifier for that round. Multiply the wound channel modifier by the subject's HP to get the blow-through value; this is tripled as normal for shots to the vitals.

Optional Rule 2: As above, but either multiply by HT (excluding extra hit points, to give that advantage more "pull" in high tech games), or by a flat value of 10, which also increases the value of high HT in high tech games.

Using these rules on an average HP individual, the .45ACP cannot ever blow through (max damage 13 pts; blow through at 13 points), while the 9mm (at $2d+2\{1\}$ by definition) will blow through more frequently (max penetration 14 points, blow through at 10). This tends to model fairly well the arguments for and against these rounds. The 9mm is frequently accused of "overpenetrating," while the .45 is frequently defended as The Worlds Greatest Pistol Cartridge because it avoids this, among other things.

Optional Rule 3: Bullets that don't kill by central nervous system damage kill by causing massive blood loss. Don't discard all that damage before it blows through. For each 7 points of damage inflicted before blow-through is applied, a wound will bleed for one HP per minute. Reduce the time interval for bleeding for large wounds, not the damage per full minute. Do include the multipliers for hits to the vitals. So a .223 round that hits the torso for $5d+1\{1.3\}$ and rolls 21 points of damage will blow through after 13, but the wound will bleed for 1 HP every 20 seconds. Thus a HT10 character will have a 50% chance of being "instantly" unconscious (less than zero HT), and will be in grave danger of bleeding out ($-5 \times \text{HT}$) after about 16 minutes. The GM as always has discretion as to whether bleeding stops by itself. Damage to the veins and arteries location bleeds three times as fast; the heart bleeds out at a rate of hits per *second*, rather than per minute.

Optional Rule 4: Fragmenting rifle wounds are ugly. First aid might slow bleeding, but it won't restore any HP. To do that typically requires a roll against the Surgery skill.

Optional Rule 5: Armor piercing rounds tend to pass through a body without tumbling. As an option, do not reduce the damage rolled by the armor divisor. Instead, re-calculate the wound channel modifier using the unmodified bullet

frontal cross-section, rather than increasing it for yaw. This will drastically reduce the wounding potential of AP and APS rounds, as they pay for their increased penetration with much decreased wounding.

Using these Rules with *GURPS Vehicles*

To use these rules with the *Vehicles 2^{ed}* design system, first design your weapon normally. You will end up with stats such as bore size, approximate barrel length, and weight per shot. Use about 2/3 of the WPS to get the projectile weight. Back-calculate the kinetic energy requirement from the bore size, and from there you can determine the projectile's velocity. Make some assumptions for chamber pressure and case length by comparison to existing cartridges, and find a barrel length that is in the length class of the weapon you designed. Note the parameters you've settled on for future reference, in case you want to design short barreled carbines or heavy barreled support weapons using the same ammo.

A Final Word

All of these calculations seem cumbersome, and they are, if you use a calculator. These rules come into their own when you enter the formulae into your favorite spreadsheet program, and can use its power to solve for damage, velocity, or other unknown parameters, or play with designs to achieve the desired results. One can duplicate the performance of nearly any cannon system, from small arms to the largest I've tried yet, the 16" guns of the Iowa class battleships (6d × 137{2050}, if you're curious!).

Bibliography and Suggested Reading

Books

- *Bullet Penetration* by Duncan MacPherson.

Websites

For cartridge information:

- <http://www.imrpowder.com/reload.html> for chamber pressures of common loads.
- http://www.integraonline.com/~bbroadside/General_Info.html for a ton of great info on many of the worlds current and might-have-been cartridges; case length, projectile mass, and typical velocities can all be found here.
- <http://www.reloadbench.com/menu1.html> for detailed descriptions of cartridge dimensions for many common handgun and rifle cartridges. Very useful for calculating the chamber volume.

Wound ballistics:

- http://home.snafu.de/l.moeller/military_bullet_wound_patterns.html is an article by Dr. Martin Fackler, Ph.D. Past president of the International Wound Ballistics Association and regarded by scientists as the foremost expert on the subject. His work is **the** definitive authority on the issue.
- <http://teapot.usask.ca/cdn-firearms/Fackler/wrong.html> is Fackler's definitive article entitled "What's wrong with the wound ballistics literature, and why." It goes into explicit and clinical (if sometimes uncomfortable for those with a good imagination) detail on how projectile weapons wound, and how they don't. Required reading for all who would discuss this issue rationally.
- www.firearmstactical.com is a good site that has an even better bibliography, and discusses in detail some of the principles used to create the wound models used above.

* * *

My thanks to Shadowman, Hans-Christian Vortisch, and Nigel McCarty-Eigenmann for helpful suggestions and comments. Also thanks to Sean Punch and David Pulver, who gave me real encouragement to keep at this task. And to my wonderful wife, who's had to put up with years of me working on my spreadsheet and ignoring her. At least she still games with me.

Building Stronger Mysteries Today For A More Secretive Tomorrow

Well, I saw the series finale of *The X-Files* last Sunday.

Now, as someone whose most recent experience with the show has been the *Fight the Future* movie, this was probably *not* the wisest spot for me to hop aboard again . . . especially since I wasn't the show's biggest fan before then. I felt not unlike that classic *Far Side* cartoon: "Blah blah blah **black oil** blah blah blah **aliens** blah blah blah **conspiracy**. . ." I hopefully won't provide any more spoilers, outside of saying that it was a very solid one-hour episode. ("But wasn't it two hours long?" I hear you ask. Yes, it was.)

Now, over on the *Pyramid* [discussion boards](#), Michael Powers said, "Ultimately, I think *X-Files*' legacy will be a warning. 'Get your metaplot straight before you start the show,' maybe."

To which Bob Huss countered with, "At least, 'Have an ending in mind.'"

Both of these comments got me thinking.

I tend to run heavily exploratory games; much of the pull of my campaigns comes from there being Big and Interesting Secrets to reveal, and these secrets provide both the conflict and the incentive for the adventurers to keep adventuring.

Now, unfortunately, very often my campaigns don't come to long-term fruition . . . especially those I intend on being long-term campaigns. No, instead they'll often go for three to six sessions, only to have the evil demon of the Real World show up and devour it. As a result, very often my partly realized campaigns often resemble various masses of dangly plot bits destined never to resolve.

I feel bad about this when it happens; I think I used to spend so much time planning for future plots, I may not have made the present game as enjoyable for my players as I could have. Soon they riot. Cities burn.

Anyway, nowadays I try to mitigate this somewhat by structuring my campaign's secrets around a more satisfying model. I generally try to break down most secrets into immediate, long-term, and perennial categories. Immediate secrets are designed to be resolved (or at least *possibly* resolved) within the current story arc . . . generally one to four adventures. Immediate secrets funnel into the long-term secrets; discovering the answer to the immediate secrets reveals the existence of a long-term secret (even if its exact nature isn't clear), or otherwise provides that first thread towards resolving the long-term secret.

I tend to space out long-term secrets within the space of a "season"; thinking of my campaign as a television series, I try to decide how many adventures constitutes a season, and plot towards long-term secrets being possibly resolved at the end of that block.

Perennial secrets may not *ever* be resolved; like an ever-tightening spiral the heroes may simply get closer and closer to the truth, without ever knowing the *full* truth. It should be made reasonably clear to the players (and perhaps even the characters) that the Full Truth isn't a necessarily obtainable goal . . . or if they *do* discover it, it means the end of the campaign (or at the very least a drastic change in the campaign). And, of course, to keep our Hussian wisdom in mind, I *do* try to have an ending in mind.

So, looking at an example here from my own gaming:

In a *Mage: The Sorcerer's Crusade* campaign I was running, I started the heroes off waking up mysteriously trapped in a castle. (Note to GMs: If I haven't stressed it enough, having the heroes start the campaign waking up in some sort of [prison](#) is a wonderful plot device. Really, instead of trying to shy away from this tendency, from now on I might

just start telling players to *expect* to wake up in a prison. Then imagine how paranoid they'll be when they begin the game seemingly *not* in a prison? But I digress . . .) So their immediate secrets include figuring out where they are, what's going on, how to get out of there, and so on.

Oh, did I mention the castle was flying? Climb the wall, intent on escape, only to discover . . . the castle was flying. Secret revealed; end second adventure.

Anyway, the mysteries of that castle were ultimately revealed, they escaped, and the heroes (two players and a NPC) all discovered that they -- son of a gun! -- had pieces of a mystic artifact that *seemed* to fit together into some sort of larger whole. But they only had a few of the pieces, so they couldn't be sure. Of course, all of them were somewhat sketchy as to how they even *acquired* those pieces in the first place.

Now, the Multi-Part Amulet of Fozzle is perhaps the oldest trick in the book in gaming. And *I* certainly preferred to think of it as an homage to that classic trope. But, really, the line between "homage" and "rip-off" is slight indeed. Regardless, it provided a nice structure for my exploratory/secretive campaigns; the quest for individual pieces could revolve nicely around discovering (and resolving) immediate secrets.

Now, the campaign ended before we could reveal terribly much more, but the *intent* was that the pieces of the artifact were tied to individual people; the pull of the campaign was not the accumulation of the pieces, per se, so much as the gathering of the *members*. That was another secret . . . a long-term one.

And once all those members were fully gathered? Well, that was one of the perennial secrets. See, this group was to find itself intertwined in a Horrible and Mysterious Plot that would send them across the entire continent, with blah blah **black oil** blah blah **shake the world to its very foundations!!!**

Anyway, the point is that I specifically designed the campaign with the idea that, although secrets and mysteries provided the narrative pull, it wasn't necessary for those secrets to be revealed for the campaign to work. There were still plenty of mysteries revealed at regular intervals. If the "series" was cancelled before the final Big Secrets could be revealed, it was hopefully still satisfying.

For those of you who are comic fans, I point to the example of Alan Moore's and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* graphic novel. [*MINI-VAGUE SPOILER ALERT*] There are many who believe -- like I do -- that the work falls somewhat apart in its last chapter (which was originally issue 12 of a 12-issue limited series). That was the chapter where all the previous threads were tied together; it was, as they say, The Big Payoff. And some folks felt that it simply didn't work. But, really, it didn't matter much; there were so many Little Payoffs along the way that, even if the destination didn't work out entirely, the journey *did*. And that's my goal. [*END SPOILER*]

And even if you *do* reveal all your perennial secrets and end the campaign, you can always gather everyone back for a movie deal or two.

* * *

As you may have noticed, Ken Hite is on assignment for the Hidden Masters to help them with @\$r#@!23%^.etern real soon.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: *The Epitaph* #1, p. 60.

(Three stars) "*The Fuzzy Boomers*: Three shaggy brothers with hick clothing and accents. One is human, one Vargr, one Aslan, but they're brothers. They are always clumsy but well-meaning, occasionally shrewd, usually stupid. Disaster follows them, but not bloodshed, and everything usually ends well."

Steampunk Heroes: Professor Pierre Arronax and Conseil

by CJ Beiting

This article is presented as a follow up to John Nowak's Pyramid article of October 16, 1998: "[Nautilus but Nice: Gaming with Captain Nemo and the Nautilus](#)" (also reprinted in [Transactions of the Royal Martian Geographical Society 3](#)) and is intended for players of *GURPS Steampunk* or other Victorian-era RPGs.

Note that some additions have been made to the character descriptions that were not provided in Jules Verne's original text, but that seemed logical. Purists should feel free to disregard material which they do not like.

Professor Pierre Arronax

104.5 points

Born 1827.

Age 40; 5'9"; 195 lbs; a slightly overweight middle-aged French scholar with curly dark hair. He is clean-shaven.

ST: 10 **DX:** 10 **IQ:** 13 [30] **HT:** 10

Speed: 5.0 **Move:** 5 **Dodge:** 5

Advantages: Reputation (author of *Mysteries of the Great Submarine Depths*, European scholarly community) (+1) [3]; Status+2 [10]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]

Disadvantages: Addiction (tobacco) [-5]; Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Dependant, competent, almost all the time (Conseil) [0]; Overweight [-5]; Phobia (sharks) [-5]; Weak Will-1 [-8]

Quirks: Not interested in money; Mildly egalitarian and interested in social justice; Non-practicing Catholic

Skills: Administration-12 [1], Animal Handling-12 [2], Appreciate Beauty-12 [3], Area Knowledge (Paris)-12 [1/2], Bard-12 [1], Diagnosis-16 [8]; First Aid-17 [2]; Geology-12 [2]; Guns (Rifle)-11 [1/2]; Naturalist (Marine Animals)-17 [12]; Paleontology-16 [10]; Phrenology-12 [1]; Physician-16 [10]; Prospecting-12 [1]; Research-13 [2]; Riding (Horse)-10 [1], Savoir-Faire-16 [2]; Science!-12 [14]; Surgery-14 [10]; Surveying-12 [1]; Survival (Plains)-11 [.5]; Swimming-10 [0]; Teamster-8 [--], Writing-14 [4]; Zoology-14 [6]

Languages: French (native)-15 [3], Latin-13 [4], English-8 [-], German-9 [-]

This is a depiction of Professor Pierre Arronax circa 1867. The events of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* will take place from 1867 to 1868, and he will publish them in serialized form in a magazine in 1869, and in final book form in 1871.

Professor Pierre Arronax is a famous French polymath born in 1827. After attending lycée and university, he went on to take a medical degree and practice medicine privately for several years. Medical practice did not satisfy his scientific interests, and he later took a position with the Paris Museum as a naturalist. He has some fame as a marine biologist, and his two-volume monograph, *The Mysteries of the Great Submarine Depths* is one of the authoritative works on the subject, guaranteeing Prof. Arronax an international reputation amongst scholars. He has some skill as a paleontologist, and makes frequent trips all over the world to collect samples for his researches and for the collection at the Paris Museum.

Prof. Arronax is an educated and cultured man, the epitome of the broadly trained Victorian scientist. He has no more than conventionally religious, and is a non-practicing Roman Catholic in that particularly French way. He is unmarried, and has little interest in the opposite sex. Finally, he is a man of divided sentiments; he clearly empathizes with the plight of the poor in the world, and clearly believes in social equality, but at the same time he accepts the social hierarchy of Victorian-era France, and keeps a 30-year old manservant whom he refers to as "boy."

The above template represents Arronax before his experiences aboard the *Nautilus* with Captain Nemo. After them,

add skills in Hard Hat Diving-12 [1] and Guns (Air Rifle)-8 [0] and raise his Naturalist (Marine animals) skill to 18 [+2]. He can also be assumed to have an Area Knowledge (Oceans) of 12 [1/2]. He will be famous (Reputation +3, everybody, [15]) as the author of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, a worldwide bestseller detailing his exploits with Captain Nemo. This will add 19.5 points to his character cost, for a grand total of 124 points.

Conseil

80.5 points

Born 1837

Age 30; 5'9"; 150 lbs; a nondescript gentleman's gentleman (i.e., no description given)

ST: 11 [10] **DX:** 10 **IQ:** 10 **HT:** 12 [20]

Speed: 5.5 **Move:** 5 **Dodge:** 5

Advantages: Ally (Arronax, almost all the time) [30]; Imperturbable [10]; Manual Dexterity-1 [3]

Disadvantages: Addiction (tobacco) [-5]; Duty (non-hazardous, almost all the time) [-10]; Humble [-1]; Odious Personal Habit (always refers to Arronax in the third person) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Arronax) [-5]; Status-1 [-5] **Quirks:** Punctual; Zealous; Can identify dead animals but not living ones. **Skills:** Animal Handling-12 [8]; Area Knowledge (Paris)-12 [4]; Cooking-12 [4]; Knife-10 [1]; Naturalist-12 [8]; Riding (Horse)-9 [1]; Savoir-Faire (Servant)-12 [4]; Survival: Plains-9 [1]; Swimming-12 [4]; Teamster-10 [1.5] **Languages:** Flemish (native)-11 [1], French-11 [4]

Conseil (no first name or description given) was born in 1837 and is Professor Arronax's manservant, traveling companion, and research assistant. As such, he has a slightly wider range of skills than the typical Victorian "gentleman's gentleman." He is Flemish, and is described by Arronax as being: "phlegmatic in temperament, punctual on principle, zealous from habit, rarely disturbed or even surprised, adroit with his hands, and apt at any service required." Conseil is completely devoted and subservient to Arronax, and despite his name, never butts in or gives advice (*conseil* being French for "advice"). His loyalty is complete, and he willingly risks his life for Professor Arronax on several occasions.

Conseil has two odd habits. In the first place, he always refers to Arronax in the third person, and as "Master," even to Arronax's face (e.g., "whatever pleases Master"), a habit which the nominally egalitarian-minded Arronax finds annoying. Secondly, while Conseil has a very exact knowledge of biology, and can instantly classify any specimen according to the Linnaean system of taxonomy, he is completely unable to identify living animals by sight. Nevertheless, he is a valuable assistant to Professor Arronax, who returns his deep devotion with warm affection in return.

Note that Arronax and Conseil are both very well-traveled, and have been "from China to the Congo" in the pursuit of Arronax's scientific researches. The game master can assume any extra Area Knowledges for the pair that he likes, and a case can be made for extra Contacts and Survival skills as needed.

Using Arronax and Conseil in a Campaign

The most important question for the GM to decide before using Arronax and Conseil as characters in a campaign is whether or not the events in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* actually happened in his campaign universe. This article proceeds from the premise that they are true, and that the subsequent account of them was written by Professor Arronax and not by Jules Verne, giving Arronax international fame of two possible types. In the first place, the sinking of several ships beginning in 1866 *does* cause an international uproar, and when the theory that a giant sea monster was responsible was formed, people "sang of it in the cafes, ridiculed it in the newspapers, [and] dramatized it on the stage." All of this happens even before the truth of Captain Nemo became known, so Arronax's subsequent fame can be assumed.

Alternatively, the GM can assume that the events of the novel happened and Arronax told his tale, but was not believed, and is considered the laughingstock of the world (Bad Reputation) for foisting a monstrous "fish story" upon

the public. This will allow for less-disrupted history of the Nineteenth Century, as only a few crackpots (i.e., the player characters) will believe him.

In any case, Prof. Arronax makes a good Patron for a variety of genres, and will be considered as such in the paragraphs below. Game masters should note that Arronax will make a good Patron in gaming terms insofar as he is somewhat indecisive and weak-willed, and as such will not hog all the action in a game. Heroes in his employ will have to make a lot of decisions on their own, and will have to convince Arronax to adopt them. Once Arronax is convinced, Conseil will do "whatever pleases Master." Do not play Arronax in such a way as to be overbearing or domineering; such is completely contrary to his character.

One small problem for GM is the fact that neither Professor Arronax nor Conseil speak English, although Arronax can read it. Like most Frenchmen, Arronax prefers to communicate solely in his native tongue, and will have to hire an interpreter if he is in an English-speaking area. Game masters who are worried about communication problems should raise his English skill to 10, and play him with a very thick French accent.

With these points in mind, the GM can use Arronax and Conseil in any of the following **GURPS** Victorian-era genres.

GURPS Steampunk

This is the default setting for the events of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, which should come as no surprise given the fact that statistics for Captain Nemo and the *Nautilus* are included therein (see p. STM51 and p. STM80 respectively). The GM will have to decide to what extent he wants to integrate the events of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* into his steampunk universe: will they be unique, or will Prof. Arronax be merely one of a league of extraordinary gentlemen from Victorian fiction who have undertaken great things? He would serve as a valuable Ally or Contact for players who are trying to build their own submersible vehicle, or as an expert on marine life, real or monstrous. Much could be made of Captain Nemo's post-*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* efforts against European imperialism, particularly British imperialism. Perhaps Professor Arronax, as the world's foremost authority on Captain Nemo, would be charged by the European Powers that Be to assemble a team and locate Captain Nemo in order to bring him to justice . . .

GURPS Old West

Although this crossover seems incongruous, it is in reality one of the most natural. Professor Arronax and Conseil begin the novel *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* by hunting fossils in Nebraska, and it is not at all unlikely that they will return to the Old West later in the 1870s for further fossil-hunting expeditions. They will be in need of guides, bodyguards, and translators . . . perfect roles for players. While hunting for fossils, they could get caught up in the great dinosaur fossil hunting wars of Edward Cope and Othniel Marsh (see p. STM9; Ken Hite gives a more in-depth treatment of the Cope/Marsh rivalry in p. STI34 or "[Use Archaeology to Uncover Hidden Adventure Ideas](#)"), which ran from the late 1870's to 1889. Alternatively, Arronax and Conseil could be presented as a pair of "gentlemen in distress" in need of rescuing from villains by a group of Old West heroes, with a surprise in store for the players after they discover the identity of the men they have rescued! After his book is published, Professor Arronax's fame will spread even to the American West, but the average cowboy or ranch hand who has heard of him is more likely to associate him with the high seas than the Wild West.

GURPS Castle Falkenstein

[NOTE: There are some discrepancies in the original R. Talsorian version of this material: the basic *Castle Falkenstein* rules (p.43) assert "Pierre Arronax" was a nom de plume for Jules Verne, and that he experienced the events of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* himself. However, the Steam Age supplement (p.69) claims that the two men were different, and that Arronax narrated his tale to Verne. This article presumes the latter interpretation.]

In the *Castle Falkenstein* universe, Jules Verne is the Science Minister of France, and as such is likely to be very interested in Arronax and his companions have to say. Furthermore, so would all of the Crowned Heads of Europe; the existence of an Infernal Device like the *Nautilus* would likely fuel an arms race under the sea, in the same way that the

Bavarian Aeronavy is fueling an arms race in the air. As the sole technically minded survivor of the *Nautilus*, Professor Arronax would be a valuable property for any power in Europe or the world that had aims on building its own similar Infernal Devices, and he might be the target of espionage or kidnapping attempts by parties ranging from the Steam Lords of Britain to the World Crime League. Doubtless he would need guarding by a suitably equipped party of stalwarts.

The original *Castle Falkenstein* material indicates that Captain Nemo was eventually convinced by Science Minister Verne to operate against those who make war "behind the scenes," such as the World Crime League. Since Nemo swore a vow never to walk on dry land walked by other men, it is likely that the person who did the "convincing" was Professor Arronax himself, acting as a liaison between the two men. The attempt to do this would provide an adventure in and of itself, and Arronax's "fishing" expedition (and future negotiation efforts!) would doubtless need the help of the player characters . . .

It should be noted that in the *Castle Falkenstein* universe, Professor Arronax will not use magick of any kind, since he is a committed Man of Science. It is possible that his classic *Mysteries of the Great Submarine Depths* might include some information on some of the aquatic Faerie races, however.

GURPS Screampunk

Although this does not seem like an obvious fit, consider the fact that *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* has some horrific elements to it, over and above attacks by cannibals and giant squids on the *Nautilus* (see the US Naval Institute Press edition of the work for a good examination of this theme). The *Nautilus* itself could be seen as an artifact of Forbidden Knowledge, resulting in Hubris and Idolatry; indeed, the entirety of Professor Arronax's trip could be seen as a Misguided Voyage of Discovery (p.SCR14-15). Then there are the other horrific elements. Throughout the journey the members of Captain Nemo's crew behave like sullen, silent automatons; why? Nemo claims that they were all with him voluntarily, but what strange power does he have over them to render them so obedient and so lifeless? Furthermore, in the end of the novel Nemo himself descends into a fit of sullen, withdrawn madness both figurative and literal; what expiation does he make by the sacrifice of himself and the *Nautilus* into the maelstrom at the end of the novel? Could it be that he was either in opposition to -- or in league with -- some hellish undersea Thing Man Was Not Meant To Know? And when he returns from the deep, will Prof. Arronax and his band of gallant heroes be able to stop him . . . ?

GURPS Atlantis

Nemo and his crew find the sunken ruins of Atlantis in Chapter 9 of Book II of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. If the GM wants to make Atlantis a part of his Victorian science fiction game (perhaps using the "Lords of the Deep" campaign from Chapter 6 of *GURPS Atlantis*), either the *Nautilus* or a similar vessel build by Professor Arronax is a useful way to get the adventurers there. Perhaps the people of Atlantis are benevolent and advanced, loathing war and exploitation and unwilling to speak to "primitives" who engage in such activities. Perhaps they are hostile and malevolent, desiring to conquer the surface world and unwilling to tolerate any opposition. In either eventuality, Captain Nemo would be a great ally for the surface world, either as a sympathetic go-between to a civilized Atlantis, or as a skilled point man in a war against a hostile Atlantis. Professor Arronax and a hand-picked crew would need to find Nemo and enlist his aid on behalf of France and the Crowned Heads of Europe . . . no easy task considering that Nemo would love to see many of those Crowned Heads destroyed for their imperialist ways.

GURPS Deadlands

The world of the Weird West provides an interesting home for Professor Arronax. Perhaps he would be investigating it on behalf of the European scientific community, which is at such a distance from the events of the Reckoning. Perhaps he and Conseil and would be interested in cataloging the various kinds of Critters and Abominations and finding out ways to defeat them. Perhaps Arronax is active in the Great Maze, investigating the Maze Dragons and other new aquatic phenomena (Captain Nemo might be there, too, since Ghost Rock is a much more likely fuel for the *Nautilus* than any other Victorian fuel source . . .). In any of these cases, Arronax will certainly need bodyguards and guides,

especially well-armed ones.

Note that long exposure to the horrors of the Weird West is likely to raise Arronax's Weak Will, his combat skills, and possibly even his faith.

D.I.Y. Random Names on the Web

by L. Lockwood

Most roleplaying games require a fairly large number of names to flesh them out: names for pre-made NPCs and improvised NPCs, for PCs, the people from their backgrounds, and their companions. Having a set of pre-generated names on hand makes a GM's work much easier when improvising, and helps prevent PCs with anachronistic names from popping up in your carefully crafted fantasy games. However, generating a large number of campaign-appropriate names is often difficult and tedious.

This article presents instructions and examples for building a Web page that randomly generates a set of names each time it is "loaded" (viewed in a Web browser, or "refreshed"), assembling the names from "building blocks" provided by you, the page's author. No previous knowledge of computer programming is necessary, although a little knowledge of HTML will allow you to make your page fancier. You don't even need to put your finished page up on the Web; it will work just as well from your computer's hard drive, although it won't be available to anyone but you.

Requirements

Building a random name generator page will require some sort of text editor (Notepad will do fine), and a Web browser that has JavaScript enabled (all versions of Netscape and Internet Explorer from the last 5 years or so have this, and many other Web browsers do as well).

If you wish to put the finished page up on the Web, you will need to have an Internet Service Provider or some other way of getting your page out there. Many organizations out on the Web, such as [GeoCities at Yahoo](#), will allow you to put up a page or two for free. Once you have a finished page, they can give you instructions on how to make it available on the Web.

Contents

Below these instructions are:

- A complete sample Web page name generator. You can copy this code into a text file, customize it as you like, name it with the extension HTM or HTML (like "mynames.html") and put it up on the Web for all to see. Or leave it on your hard drive where you can use it privately.
- A breakdown of the various parts of the code, explaining how each part works and how you can modify it to produce your own set of random names.
- Tips and tricks for building specific kinds of random names.
- Tips on flushing the bugs out of your JavaScripts if they don't work right the first time.

The Complete Sample Page

Random names produced by the sample code below will be similar to the following:

Asusarvon, Osuman, Isaivon, Yelardar, Ilimar, Omulaldar, Radar, Omavon, Chur, Evadar, Velak, Osaisarvon, Chalardar, Erisadar, Filavek, Ged, Rivek, Chimal, Amelarvon, Amat, Omom, Atar, Uner, Kan, Ilaik, Ered, Klairkesh, and Daisag.

If these names are not to your taste, don't worry; this code is fully customizable.

```
<html>
<head>
```



```

<script language="JavaScript">
    var first = new Array("B", "Ch", "D", "F", "G", "H", "J", "K", "Kl", "L",
        "M", "N", "P", "Qu", "R", "S", "T", "V", "W", "Y", "Z",
        "Am", "An", "At", "As", "Ev", "En", "El", "Er", "Il", "Ir", "Is",
        "Om", "Or", "Os", "Ul", "Um", "Un");

    var second = new Array("a", "a", "ai", "e", "a", "e", "i", "i", "o",
        "u", "ai");

    var third = new Array("ra", "na", "la", "sa", "ma", "", "", "", "", "");

    var fourth = new Array("dar", "rdar", "ldar", "von", "rvon", "vek",
        "rkesh", "ngkesh", "d", "g", "k", "l", "n", "m", "r", "t");

</script>

<script language="JavaScript">
    function Roll(arrayName){
        return arrayName[Math.round(Math.random() * (arrayName.length - 1))];
    }

</script>

<title>Random Foobazian Names (Male)</title>
</head>
<body>
<h2>Random Foobazian Male Names</h2>

<script language="JavaScript">
    var NumberOfNames = 30;

    for (var i = 0; i < NumberOfNames; i++){
        document.write(Roll(first) + Roll(second)
            + Roll(third) + Roll(fourth) + "<br>");
    }

</script>

</body>
</html>

```

Breaking Down the Code

The first part of the page simply sets up the basics of a Web page:

```

<html>
<head>

```

Incidentally, in HTML, anything put between < and > is called a "tag." You'll see this term again later.

The first JavaScript sets up lists (called arrays) of "name parts." Each array has its own unique name, and later JavaScripts will pick random "name parts" from these arrays, then assemble them and display the results. This particular script creates four arrays, named "first", "second", "third", and "fourth."

```

<script language="JavaScript">

    var first = new Array("B", "Ch", "D", "F", "G", "H", "J", "K", "Kl", "L",
        "M", "N", "P", "Qu", "R", "S", "T", "V", "W", "Y", "Z",
        "Am", "An", "At", "As", "Ev", "En", "El", "Er", "Il", "Ir", "Is",
        "Om", "Or", "Os", "Ul", "Um", "Un");

    var second = new Array("a", "a", "ai", "e", "a", "e", "i", "i", "o",
        "u", "ai");

    var third = new Array("ra", "na", "la", "sa", "ma", "", "", "", "", "");

    var fourth = new Array("dar", "rdar", "ldar", "von", "rvon", "vek",
        "rkesh", "ngkesh", "d", "g", "k", "l", "n", "m", "r", "t");

```

```
</script>
```

The second JavaScript defines a single function, called Roll (as in "roll the dice"). This function randomly picks one item from an array, when you give it the name of the array. You don't need to understand how it works, it will be easy to see how to use it once it is demonstrated. Just copy it into your page as it is.

```
<script language="JavaScript">
    function Roll(arrayName){
        return arrayName[Math.round(Math.random() * (arrayName.length - 1))];
    }
</script>
```

Then there's a little more basic HTML:

```
<title>Random Foobazian Names (Male)</title>
</head>
<body>
<h2>Random Foobazian Male Names</h2>
```

Whatever you put between the `<title>` and `</title>` tags will usually be displayed somewhere in the browser when the page is viewed. Netscape and IE both put this information in the bar at the top of the browser window, next to the Minimize, Maximize, and Close buttons.

Whatever you put between the `<h2>` and `</h2>` tags will appear as a large, usually bold header when your page is viewed.

The third and final JavaScript uses the Roll function to assemble random names and display them. Writing a line of code like this:

```
document.write(Roll(first));
```

... selects a random name part from the array named "first", and writes it out on the Web page. Writing a line of code like this:

```
document.write(Roll(first) + Roll(second));
```

... selects one random name part from each of those two arrays, puts them together, and writes the resulting name out on the Web page. The rest of the third script is all either controlling how many names to write to the page or formatting the page itself.

```
<script language="JavaScript">
    var NumberOfNames = 30;
    for (var i = 0; i < NumberOfNames; i++){
        document.write(Roll(first) + Roll(second)
            + Roll(third) + Roll(fourth) + "<br>");
    }
</script>
```

The first line of code in the this last script defines a variable called NumberOfNames and sets it equal to 30. This determines how many random names appear on the page. If you wish to create longer or shorter pages, change this number from 30 to whatever you desire. Be careful not to delete the semicolon after the number.

The line of code that begins "for(var i = 0.." does the work of building the specified number of random names. You won't need to alter it, you can just copy it as it is.

The addition of the "`
`" at the end of each name puts the next name on a new line. `
` is HTML for "line break." If you don't want the names to come out in a vertical list, try replacing the "`
`" with ", " (a comma and a space), which will produce a regular paragraph-style list.

Then there's a little more HTML to end the page:

```
</body>  
</html>
```

Notes on Name-Building

The main challenge in using this code is picking the lists of name parts that will combine to create the kind of names that you want for your game. Do you want your names to sound like those from a real world culture? Like those from a favorite fantasy novel? Perhaps you want a new and unique "feel" to the names in your game. You may want to create multiple name generators, two for each culture in your game world, one each for male names and female names. Here are some tricks and tips:

- **Repetition changes probability:** You may have noted that some of the name parts in the arrays above are repeated. Including a name part in an array more than once makes it more likely to be randomly picked, and makes it a more common part of the set of names that are generated. If you were trying to make a modern American name generator that used random first names and family names, you would obviously want to make "John" a more common first name than "Ezekiel."
- **Everything's in the ending:** A lot of the feeling of a name, especially the implication that a name is masculine, feminine, or from a particular culture, can be created by carefully choosing the set of possible endings for names. To an English-speaking person, for example, names that end in -ine, -issa, and -ea usually sound feminine, while names ending in -er, -o, and -us will tend to sound male. Similarly, certain endings on last names automatically bring certain real-world cultures to mind; names that end in -ski tend to sound Polish or Russian, for example.
- **Vary name length for variety:** It often harms the believability of a list of random names if they are all the same number of syllables. Sometimes it is appropriate, especially in the case of Sci-Fi aliens like the Thranx (from the *Humanx* novels). Most times it is better to have a variable number of syllables in your name set. This can be achieved with the above code in two ways: either include name parts of varying length, or include blank name parts in your name part arrays. Both of these methods are used in the sample code.

In the first method, you might include ending name parts like "d", "dar", and "darkesh." Thus, if the first part of a random name is "Bara", it might turn out to be "Barad", "Baradar", or "Baradarkesh."

In the second method, including a blank name part or "" in a name part array presents a chance that no name part will be generated from that array. Let's say you have a first name part of "Loa" and a third name part of "tima." If the possible second name parts are "", "n", and "nar", the three possible names are "Loatima", "Loantima", and "Loanartima." If you create a name part array that has 20 items, ten of which are "", there is a 50% chance that any name generated will have no name part from that array.

- **Start small and simple:** It may be tempting to immediately create a ten-part name generator, with each array containing 100 or more name parts. This might work out fine, or might become a frustrating disaster. Start small, with two or three parts to each name, and 10 to 20 name parts per array. It will make fine-tuning the generator (and building it up later) much easier.
- **Larger name parts make for more recognizable names:** arrays of name parts like "dara" and "elkesh" tend to make for a more predictable and consistent set of names. Arrays of name parts like "ak", "e", and "el" will tend to produce more random, often alien-seeming names. This may or may not be precisely what you are looking for, or trying to avoid.

For fun, or for Mr. Mxyzptlk-style names, try making a generator with only one name part array, containing only single letters and extra vowels, that is used five or more times per name, like this:

```
var alpha = new Array("a", "b", "c", "d", "e", "f", "g", "h",  
    "i", "j", "k", "l", "m", "n", "o", "p", "q", "r", "s",  
    "t", "u", "v", "x", "y", "z",  
    "a", "e", "i", "o", "u",  
    "a", "e", "i", "o", "u",
```

```
    "a", "e", "i", "o", "u");  
document.write(Roll(alpha) + Roll(alpha) + Roll(alpha)  
    + Roll(alpha) + Roll(alpha) + "<br>");
```

This will give you names that are so random, they will be hard to pronounce, like "Ybeie", "Xsuam", and "Aijpu."

- **Hyphens, spaces, and !'s:** If you want to put other characters in the middle of names, for making first and last names, for example, you can do so easily, like so:

```
document.write(Roll(first) + Roll(second) + " " + Roll(third) + "<br>");
```

To put in a hyphen, exclamation point, or the word "foo," instead of a space, you could code any of these, instead:

```
document.write(Roll(first) + "-" + Roll(second) + Roll(third) + "<br>");  
document.write(Roll(first) + Roll(second) + Roll(third) + "!" + "<br>");  
document.write(Roll(first) + Roll(second) + " foo " + Roll(third) + "<br>");
```

- **Stealing from the real world:** If you are completely at a loss to think of a place to start with your name part arrays, or you want to simulate the "feel" of a particular culture, you can take real names and divide them up by syllable. For example, chopping up the names Jonathan, Edgar, Louis, William, and Stanislaus gets you the following arrays:

First: "Jon", "Ed", "Lou", "Will", "Stan"

Second: "a", "gar", "is", "i", "is"

Third: "than", "", "", "am", "laus"

Using the name part arrays above would give you names like "Jongar", "Louaam", "Edis", and "Stana." To get more variety, you'll need larger name part arrays. Luckily, there are plenty of names to dissect. When doing this with names from other cultures in the real world, bear in mind that the names that result may have strange, comical, or even offensive meaning to speakers of the language that those names come from.

Fixing Errors JavaScript

- **JavaScript is case sensitive:** Running afoul of case sensitivity is one of the most common coding errors. If you have defined a function called "Roll", JavaScript will not know what you mean when you type "roll", since there is a difference in capitalization. If your scripts don't work, this is the first thing to look for.
- **JavaScript statements end with a semicolon:** Almost all of them, to be precise. A semicolon tells JavaScript when a line of code is ending. Without it, you can (correctly) wrap a single "line" of code across several lines of text. However, if you omit a semicolon where you really should have one, JavaScript will try to interpret two different lines of code as if they were one, and that usually causes an error.

For finding out more about the code-writing tools that are already built into your web browser, see the browser's Help files, or the section of the browser manufacturer's web site devoted to supporting Web developers.

For tutorials and more information on JavaScript online, see www.webmonkey.com and www.irt.org, or do a search on "JavaScript tutorial" in your favorite search engine.

For comprehensive manuals on HTML and JavaScript for the serious developer, try books by [O'Reilly and Associates](#).

Samples

- The main example in this article is in [mynames.html](#)
- The very random Mxyzptlk-esque names is in [veryrandom.html](#)
- A version of the "[Space Opera Name Generator](#)" article is in [spaceopera.html](#)

- The random name generator from the article "[What's In A Name?](#)" is at whatsinaname.html

Appendix Z: Smugglers

or, "Could You Please Open This Case, Sir?"

by Michele Armellini

Wherever and whenever authorities try to control trade, there will be those who want to circumvent the controls, and the duties: smugglers. Playing characters might well be full-time smugglers (or customs officers!) and have a string of exciting, far-reaching, diverse adventures; or they might get involved in smuggling on a one-off basis.

While the concept is straightforward (cross the borders avoiding the law enforcers and deliver the goods), the GM might make use of some help in determining the details of this profitable, although risky and illegal, business. While a historical background should make it easy to decide who is smuggling what and where, if your game setting is fantasy or SF, you might find these suggestions useful.

Why Are The Goods Illegal?

The smugglers' activities are determined by the laws in force and by demand. The attitude of the customs officers and the severity of the penalties, and, therefore, the price of the goods and the risk for the smugglers will also depend upon this key question: why is this traffic illegal? The examples don't mention specific places or times but they should be clear enough.

These merchandises are:

1. perfectly legal in the country of destination, *but* there are customs duties on them. Thus the smuggled goods can be sold at a lower price, becoming more attractive for the locals. E.g., tobacco, alcohol, high-end consumer goods.
2. illegal because they come from a specific country, which is under a boycott; otherwise they'd be legal (although they might be subject to duties). E.g., Cuban cigars or Israeli foodstuffs.
3. a breach of other laws or trade policies. They may be items whose availability is regulated to control their price (diamonds), goods that threaten endangered species (ivory, horns, live animals) or low-quality counterfeits of copyright or trademark products (e.g. counterfeited watches, clothing, pirated media).
4. below the safety standards in the country of destination. E.g., foodstuffs, drugs, vital electronics, even electrical devices. Sometimes these goods are counterfeits, too, such as low-quality counterfeits of key aircraft spare parts.
5. illegal in the country of destination, period. They may be considered more or less dangerous. E.g., narcotics, alcohol; but also contraceptives, satellite receivers, genetically-engineered products, androids, necromantic items.
6. a threat to national security. E.g., weapons, explosives, radioactive materials, mass-destruction devices.

The cases are listed in order of sensitivity! With a case 1 offense, the penalty might be a stiff fine, the risk is low, and the law enforcers might be lukewarm; things change considerably with cases 5 and 6.

Special Cases

Sometimes the smugglers don't deal in objects, but in people, ideas or information. Also, sometimes it isn't the country of destination that objects to the trade.

- People smugglers may deal in slaves, escaped slaves, illegal immigrants, fugitives, refugees, key scientists -- or wizards.
- Some oppressive regimes don't like their population to be exposed to "dangerous" ideas. In these cases,

smugglers will carry books (e.g. "heretical" or "subversive" texts), magazines (including pornography), other media (Western music, forbidden "decadent" art, censored movies, snuff holograms).

- Those who deal in intelligence (military, industrial, trade secrets) are spies. However, sometimes the data sought for congeal into an object that has to be physically moved: a sample, a prototype, a recording, a blueprint microfilm . . . a few silkworm cocoons! So it's a smuggler's job.
- Sometimes, it's not the country of destination that forbids the trade. There might be blockades by third parties, or export bans: as for the silkworm cocoons mentioned above, or archaeological treasures, state-of-the-art sonars, anti-matter technology etc. This doesn't make a great difference for smugglers, however.

How Do They Carry The Goods?

There are four key tactics:

- avoidance,
- concealment and deception,
- bribery,
- brute force.

Avoidance normally means picking your route in such a way as to avoid checkpoints and patrols. It was the tactic of choice for low-tech smugglers who trekked through mountain ranges, sometimes with just a sackful of tobacco, or with pack mules. But wherever the borders are extensive and costly to patrol (such as the English Channel coast or a few star systems), this is the preferred means. It requires knowledge of the area, outdoor skills, and/or sea- or space-faring capabilities. Also, it will let you bring in bulky cargo. Sometimes, avoidance isn't based just on stealth: a cutter, powerboat, or rogue trader spaceship can be so fast that even if detected, the customs vessels can't intercept it.

Deceiving the customs by concealing the goods is the way to go if you really have to pass a border (or airport or space station) check, and is best used when the load isn't counted in the tons. The merchandise can be stowed away in hidden compartments on vehicles and on (or sometimes *inside*) the smuggler's body. A wide range of tricks can be used, up to exploiting an unwary tourist as "mule." These systems are often used by contemporary drugs traffickers; but illegal immigrants, too, can be shipped as "hidden cargo." The smugglers will know the customs procedures, they'll be clever in hiding the goods, and they should be able to act, deceive and confuse.

Bribery is obvious, and is sometimes used as an alternative if another method fails. But the best way is to have a standing arrangement with the local law enforcers; this only works if they can be bought, of course! It's the most common system for Prohibition-era alcohol smuggling, but can be handy wherever the patrolmen are underpaid -- to ship an ancient icon out of Belarus or a load of 'droids on a backward organic-workforce-only planet.

Brute force implies a militarized outfit, usually something like a man-of-war (and indeed it's more used at sea, and might be used in space). These smugglers will preferably use avoidance but they are ready to fight their way in. This works better as a surprise tactic: if this becomes standard practice, of course it's no more the outgunned customs officers' business -- the navy will be deployed to counter what amounts to a war. Some historians think that the Trojan War wasn't about a woman, but about the Black Sea foodstuffs over which the Achaeans didn't want to pay what today we'd call transit duties!

Everything else being equal, smugglers will prefer goods having the highest weight/value ratio (just like most legitimate traders). Things like jewels, powerful drugs, or microchips can be both easy to conceal and very valuable.

Smuggler's Pick

These are lists of what smugglers might carry at various tech levels. Note that state-of-the-art weaponry isn't listed below because it is *always* sought for. When your enemy has attained a higher level in that field, you want to . . . level the field! So iron weapons, steel blades, and nuclear warheads always make for brisk business if there is someone around who lacks them.

"Artworks" always includes both contemporary and ancient items (sometimes of historical or archaeological value).

"Consumer goods" may always include counterfeits, boycotted products, pirated media and below-standard items.

- **TL 0-3:** alcohol, salt, foodstuffs, amber, spices, magical items
- **TL 4-6:** alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, other consumer goods, slaves, escaped slaves, foodstuffs, textiles, artworks, books
- **TL 7-8:** narcotics, alcohol, drugs, illegal immigrants, protected animals, consumer goods, slaves (yes), artworks
- **TL 9+:** narcotics, drugs, genetically-engineered products and organisms, consumer goods, genetic materials, counterfeits, robots and androids, AI memory banks, clones...

Adventure Seeds

- **Freedom smugglers.** The PC smugglers are defying a totalitarian government, going in with weapons and guerrilla leaders, coming out with refugees and censored samizdata. Not only they have to dodge the fearsome secret police; their side is actually a hodgepodge alliance, with groups spying on each other and trying to obtain the pick of the cargo from the PCs. Then, they are asked to bring in mass-destruction weapons. What do they do?
- **Through the wilderness.** The party is hired as guides/guards/crewmen for a caravan/expedition/huge cargo starship. As they soon discover, they are actually trying to establish a new smuggling route, while carrying a valuable first shipment. They have to face the hostile environment and natives, the border guard, and the competition, while possibly negotiating a new agreement with their devious employers.
- **Unwary "mules."** The heroes are traveling on their own business and, at a border check, a strange item is found in their baggage. They are arrested as smugglers, and they'll be facing a harsh sentence . . . unless they accept the prosecutor's deal: frame the real culprit. Unfortunately, the latter was watching at the customs, and won't be easily fooled. And what's that mysterious item, anyway?

Useful *GURPS* References

- **The description of the Holdout skill (p. B66) is an adventure seed in itself.**
- **For hidden cargo compartments, see p. VE15.**
- **For Flesh Pockets, see p. CY34.**
- **See also pp. F18-19, 60 for low-tech smuggling.**
- ***GURPS Tredroy* is full of references to smuggling activity on Yrth, see pp. TR11-12, TR17, TR20, TR33, TR41.**
- ***GURPS Alternate Earths* gives lots of suggestions for interesting trans-dimensional smuggling.**
- ***GURPS Rogues* will include a Smuggler template.**

Pyramid Review

Riôt!

Published by [Green Dragon Creations Inc.](#)

Written by **Raphael Adley**

Illustrated by **Ana**

\$11.99

Being of an age that is less inclined to go out and cause a public disturbance, and having been a "mature" student at University and therefore supposed also less inclined to do so, although I did attend a protest -- the concept of being able to start and control a riot in my own home is nevertheless appealing. This is what ***Riôt!***, a little game from the computer software publisher, Green Dragon Creations Inc. allows you to do.

Riôt! comes packaged in a small 3½-inch diameter tin which, though visually eye-catching, is all too likely to get lost on the shelves of both your local friendly game store and your gaming collection. Inside are the rules (these open out to two sides of an 8½"×1" sheet of paper), a deck of sixty two-inch square cards, forty black counters, twenty yellow counters, and a tiny ¼-inch square six-sided die. It is designed for two to six players, ages eleven and over, with games lasting between twenty and forty-five minutes. The aim of ***Riôt!*** is to build the largest riot on campus; accumulate twenty rioters and you win the game.

At the beginning of the game each player receives three cards and rolls the die to see who goes first. If seated round a table, play proceeds clockwise, but anti-clockwise if played elsewhere. Then everyone states the reason for their riot: poor food in the cafeteria, not enough surf time allocated, classes are too easy (???) or an influx of mimes on campus.

On his turn, a player draws a new card and can play any one card from his hand. If he chooses not to play a card down on the table, he can add a single free rioter to their riot. Either way, he can still use as many or as few of the events listed on the cards he has in play on the table as he wants. This can be done in any order he wishes and the new card played can be put down at any time during the turn, although events cannot be used until their subsequent turn. The rioters are represented by the yellow and black counters -- one demonstrator by a black token, and five by a yellow token.

The cards represent events and various factors that can increase or decrease the size of a riot. They come in several types: Actions, colored red; Reactions colored yellow; Actions/Reactions which are both red and yellow; Law Enforcements in blue, Leaders/Student Leaders in green; and Permanents, which are white. There are also four totally black cards, which are to use if you want to make up or create new cards (though you need a marker that will write easily on black!). The cards are printed on a thin stock and are illuminated with a photograph tinted the same color as their card type. Many cards are marked with a "1," which means that they can only be used once before being discarded. Other cards can only be played under certain conditions, such as requiring a particular number of rioters in a protest, or against another card.

Red -- or Actions -- cards generally add to your riot or deduct from an opponent's. Several require a Law Enforcements card to also be in play, such as "Arrest," which can force a Leaders/Student Leaders card to be discarded. Players should enjoy the irony in the "Game Store Break-In" card, although the rules on its use are not as clear as they could be, and a little thought is needed to realize fully how it works.

The yellow -- or Reactions -- cards each counter a specific card or cards. For example, the rather vicious "B.B. Gun"

Pyramid Review: Riôt!



prevents any "Horse Cops" from acting against a riot, while "17-Year Old Gas" reduces the effect of police tear gas. One favorite is "Inter-Departmental Confusion," which redirects attentions of the police to another Riót!

The evenly divided red/yellow Actions/Reactions cards can be played as either type. The "Couch" can negate an attempt to put out a fire as a Reaction card, or double the number of rioters added for the effect of a fire as an Action card. The "Censors" card -- delicately illustrated with the image of a chimp holding a hand over its mouth -- can either negate the effect of an "Editorial" if used as a Reaction card, or negate the effect of an "E-mail" as an Action card.

The blue Law Enforcements cards come in a variety of different flavors: Horse Cop, State Police, University Cop (complete with push bikes!) Local Cop (illustrated by a picture of a steady hand on a gun), SWAT team, Peace Team, and Firemen. Each type has an activation number, which is the number of rioters needed to be active before the cops can act. The more powerful the cops, the more rioters needed. Thus the university cop reacts to five or more rioters, but the SWAT team will only be sent to riots of fifteen or more. All law enforcement cards have a force level, which is the number of dice rolled to counter a riot. Each roll of five or six sends a rioter home (here is where more dice might have been handy). Firemen do not act against rioters to send them home, but rather to extinguish a fire, around which rioters have a tendency to gather.

The green Leaders/Student Leaders cards remain in play until forced home and add up to three rioters per turn. The white Permanents cards perform in a similar fashion, remaining in play until countered by another player, and adding more rioters each turn. Unlike other cards in the game, both green and white take effect the very turn that they are put down on the table, so it is beneficial to get these into play as soon as possible.

The problems with *Riót!* are far and few. The first is that the rules could have been better explained, but a thorough read-through and close examination of the cards should make things a little clearer. The second problem is the single die provided in the game -- it is too small, probably all-too-easy to lose, and more than one is needed. Fortunately, what gamer does not possess a handful of six-sided dice?

Of course the tactics in *Riót!* involve increasing the size of your own riot, while directing the cops to the riots of your opponent's. This may be a slow process as only one card can be played each turn -- but actual game play proceeds at a decent pace, so this problem should be countered within a few turns. Much of this will involve getting the green and white cards out on the table so that they can start building riots quickly -- where as the others will be bringing out the Law Enforcements cards that will allow arrest cards to target the leaders as well as targeting the Permanents. That said, it is difficult to target riots with large numbers with the Arrest card, literally because the force levels of the various Law Enforcements cards are not powerful enough! These range from one to four, so that if you follow the cards instructions -- rolling 2d6 plus the law enforcement card's force level to get higher than the riot level -- you cannot roll more than sixteen. Riots of this size are thus immune to arrest. Without a method of combining Law Enforcements cards to increase their total force level, I would suggest that instead the players should roll 3d6 when playing an Arrest card.

For the first release from a new company, *Riót!* is not quite there as a design -- it is slightly repetitive in play, and it does suffer from less-than-clear rules. Despite these problems *Riót!* is still playable and looks attractive, and is a physically well-packaged product, so the slight design flaws can be put down as teething problems. If they can overcome these, I think that this certainly bodes well for the next release from Green Dragon Creations Inc. For those wanting a demonstration of this game, can check out their [Website](#), where there versions available in both the QuickTime and Flash movie formats.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Star Wars Jedi Unleashed

Published by [Milton Bradley](#)



Design by **Craig Van Ness**

Gameboard, 18 Jedi cards, 3 dice, 74 plastic stands and cardboard pawns; \$9.95

"On Geonosis, the Jedi are lured into battle. Faced with the possibility of a rebellion, Yoda commits an army to fight the Geonosians."

After finding [Star Wars Epic Duels Game](#) so much fun I decided to try another one of the new Milton Bradley game offerings timed with the release of *Star Wars Episode II*. (*Jedi Unleashed*, *Epic Duels*, *Star Wars Stratego*, and *Star Wars Life* were all released on the same day.) Unlike the *Epic Duels* game, *Jedi Unleashed* is a lot more of what one would expect from a mass-market boardgame . . . which is an unfortunate disappointment after the extremely fun and surprising *Epic Duels* game.

Before playing the game you'll need to punch out the 18 Jedi cards and 74 standups. All are printed on heavy cardboard and, just like all of the game's components, are of excellent print and production quality. It takes about twenty minutes or so to get all of the pieces punched and in their plastic stands. After carefully placing all of the pieces on the large gameboard (about 21" x 21") you're ready to begin play.

The Game

Each player is dealt a number of Jedi cards; these represent the figures he will control during the game. The cards are numbered from 1 to 18 and the player with the lowest numbered card goes first.

On your turn you can move and attack with one of your Jedi, and then move and attack with one opponent (Geonosian, battle droid, Count Dooku, and Jango Fett). All figures are limited to moving six spaces in a turn, and attacking is handled with a die roll (white die for Jedi, black die for opponents).

The white die has four Jedi symbols and two Yoda symbols. The Jedi symbols indicate the target is hit and destroyed (unless you are attacking Count Dooku or Jango Fett). You continue rolling the die every time you get a Jedi symbol or until all of the adjacent targets are destroyed. Count Dooku and Jango Fett require two Jedi symbols to be rolled in succession to be destroyed.

Rolling the Yoda symbol ends your turn and moves the Yoda pawn one step closer to Geonosis. After Yoda has moved 15 times he reaches the planet and the game ends.

The black die has two hit symbols, one Jedi symbol, and three starfields. Rolling the hit symbol wounds the Jedi attacked (a second hit kills him). Rolling the Jedi symbol means the attacker was destroyed by the Jedi. The starfields indicate a miss.

And that's the game. When your turn ends play proceeds clockwise. The game

The Reek

Known as "advanced play," the Reek moves around the gameboard with his own red die. In theory you can ride the Reek and any opponents the monster kills are claimed by the Jedi currently onboard. In our game all the Reek ever did was **stop**.

While the idea was very cool, the headaches involved with riding the Reek just proved too

ends when either Yoda arrives or there is only one player with Jedi still alive. The player with the most kills wins.

annoying for the promised returns. After a few tries there were no additional attempts at moving or riding the Reek.

Conclusions

Setting the gameboard up for play takes too long for too little return. 74 pawns is a lot and, even with help, it'll take five to ten minutes after opening the box before you're playing. Your first game adds about twenty minutes to that time (punching out pieces and such).

The game says for players 8 and up but I don't know how 8 year-olds could find this game exciting when *Epic Duels* is available and states the same age range. I could see it saying "5 to 8" but 8 and up was a poor call on Milton Bradley's part.

I cannot recommend this game to anyone except the absolute youngest of players. If you're looking for a way to turn a young *Star Wars* fan into a gamer try using *Epic Duels* or the new trading card game. The only people I can see happily owning this are hardcore collectors who must own everything that has the Lucas seal of approval.

--Philip Reed

Setting Up Setting Need Not Be Upsetting

I received a number of emails about last week's column; most of them mentioned that the idea of a flying castle is pretty cool, and one they were going to need to steal. This, coupled with a viewing yesterday of *Star Wars: I Think I'm A Clone Now* last night (don't worry; no spoilers), has gotten me to thinking about gaming. (Really, rice pudding gets me to thinking about gaming, but you know . . .)

Hey, GMs! Looking for a good way to spice up *any* encounter or scene? It's simple! Setting is everything.

As far as simple enhancements to make encounters more interesting, coming up with an interesting scene for an encounter will generally give you a lot of bang for your mental buck.

The reason is pretty simple; many of the cool bits in gaming -- an interesting line of dialogue, a surprise tactic, a neat way of working a clue into the narrative -- have to be thought of in a second or two. An interesting setting, on the other hand, can be thought of well in advance of actually being used, and will be appreciated by everyone in the scene. What *was* a standard fistfight between Good Guys and Bad Guys becomes something more when that fight is at a circus, during a city-wide power outage, or in (or on top of!) a train.

Here, then, are some off-the-cuff ideas towards making those scenes memorable and different ones.

Vehicles. Vehicles are a classic complicated setting for action movies and gamers alike. They provide motion (indicating that they're *going* someplace interesting) and a confined environment (getting knocked off the back of a truck has larger consequences than getting knocked off a sidewalk curb). And, in the post-modern environment, "vehicle" has become a more expansive term; giant water and land vehicles are possible now, with the prospect of grandiose air and space craft in the not-too-distant future.

- Aircraft carrier
- Cruise ship
- Jumbo jet
- Mobile-home carrying truck
- Monorail (high above someplace interesting/dangerous)
- Nuclear submarine

Natural Environmental Concerns. Rain, sleet, snow, darkness, tornados, and other forces of nature can all augment a boring scene. Just think about what kinds of effects are possible in the scene as written, and contemplate adding one or two. Again, a bar fight becomes more exciting with the prospect of a flashflood at any minute.

- Hurricane
- Lightning
- Fire!
- Mudslide
- Lava

Unnatural Environmental Concerns. As much damage as nature can do, humans can generally come up with something worse. If the interior of the factory is filling up with propane gas, the prospect of a gunfight becomes *much* more dangerous. Consider what can go wrong, how it will affect the situation, and how it can be overcome or avoided.

- Inconvenient spilling fluids (gasoline, liquid nitrogen, acid, hair depilatory)
- Electricity
- Paint
- Feathers
- Noise (music, machinery, people)

Scale. Think about what makes a possible setting interesting, then consider amplifying or diminishing it. For example, shopping malls are often pretty crowded; a scene there would be pretty interesting. Now consider what that scene would be like with Christmas-shopping crowd madness . . . or after-hours, when it's completely empty? If an elevator is interesting because it can be confining, what if you had a *really* big elevator, reducing that confinement? (What if that elevator had no enclosed sides? Lots of room to maneuver, but watch that first step; it's a doozy . . .) Or what if the scene takes place on a wall full of tiny elevators, with room for only one person each?

Places We Aren't Allowed to Fight. If the scene is planned out primarily as a combat, just think of where people normally aren't allowed to fight. (Admittedly, that's most places, but an open field is a tad more conducive to combat than a high school cafeteria.)

- Library
- China shop
- Zoo
- Amusement park
- Revolving restaurant

Places We Won't Be Able To Go. Most of us will never see the Oval Office, or the top of Mount Fuji, or the inside of a CEO's office . . . which is all the more reason for an exciting scene to take place there! For pure escapist fantasy, not much beats having a scene take place in an exotic locale the players would be interested in.

Historical Landmarks. If you're looking for a place you *really* aren't supposed to fight, consider historical landmarks. The majority of us will never be involved in a fight to the death on the arm of the Statue of Liberty . . . but it sure is fun to consider what would happen *if* an interesting scene were to happen there. Historical landmarks also have the advantage that they usually have scads of information available about them, including maps and statistics. (If you're playing in a fantasy or science fiction game, don't forget the possibility of making up your own landmarks!)

Putting It All Together. Let's see how we can put all these pieces together in a few samples.

- *Example 1:* In a Wild West game, the GM knows that the evidence needed to save the orphanage is hidden. He creates clues that lead the heroes to discern that it's in a barn, placed under a bale of hay. To make things more challenging, it's in the second floor loft portion of the barn . . . with a makeshift firebomb trap rigged to the door by the Bad Guy! If the scene goes as the GM plans, the heroes will need to get to the top floor, searching under hay bales while contending with a steadily rising fire.
- *Example 2:* In a modern espionage game, the heroes have tracked down a stolen nuclear bomb. It's hidden inside an oil tanker (filled with oil). The chase is on; the tanker is currently going from England to France via the Chunnel. And if they don't stop the tanker before it gets to the other side, Very Bad Things will happen.
- *Example 3:* In a science fiction game, the GM decides that the Xagulan League will be making its sinister plans at Vasper's Station, an orbital space station that's currently closed for holidays and the birthplace of Daskia Tomero, inventor of the Zedgrav Drive. The Station is in decent repair -- being a historical landmark -- but old and lacking many of the conveniences of more modern stations. The anti-gravity generators, in particular, are prone to breaking; visitors are normally given instructions what to do if they fail. (*Proper* visitors, that is . . . those who sneak aboard, like the heroes, are on their own . . .) If combat (or deliberate sabotage) *does* take place, too much momentum may tilt the Station out of alignment of its solar panels, meaning the entire station would have less than 30 minutes of emergency power until reoriented . . .

As an infinite number of James Bond movies have shown, setting can make or break a scenario. A little thought and planning can turn an otherwise mundane encounter into something truly memorable.

* * *

I haven't mentioned it earlier, but voting is going on even as I type for the Origins Awards, and will be through June 10th. The highest honor the gaming community can bestow its own products, the Origins Awards cover the gamut of the gaming world . . . including Best Professional Game Periodical, for which *Pyramid* has been nominated (our eighth

Pika!



nomination . . . we even won last year!).

Yet again the gaming world is lucky to have so many excellent possibilities in gaming; both *Dragon* and *Dungeon/Polyhedron* have been nominated (some astute readers have noticed my gushing fan letter to *Dungeon* magazine earlier this year), as well as the ever-popular *Knights of the Dinner Table*, the all-covering *Games Unplugged*, and our friend John Kovalic's inimitable *Dork Tower*. Really, it's hard to make a bad choice here . . . unless you don't vote; then the powers of democracy fail utterly, and chaos engulfs the Earth (or whatever "Rock The Vote" propaganda they use nowadays).

Plus there are scads of other great products in different categories, all waiting patiently and hopefully for your vote.

So vote today online at <http://www.originsawards.com>, and support your favorite gaming products!

* * *

Speaking of John Kovalic, he's spent the week chained to the drawing table getting lots of *Dork Tower*-y goodness off to press, so he hasn't had any time to get us anything this week. Hopefully he'll be back next week; in the meantime, all you mad scientists working on matter transporters may want to consider trying to beam him a lemonade or some European candy or other cool goodies.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: GURPS Traveller Planetary Survey 1: Kamsii, p. 20.

(*Two stars*) "Some call them the Warders of Men. Others call them the Warders of Apes. But the tribe that will one day be the Glass Walkers is content to simply answer to 'the Warders.'"

The Thunder of Mighty Wings: The Mothman Cometh

"In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying . . . 'Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly: How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?'"

-- Job 4:13-19

Since the time of Job, winged beings have brought torment and revelation in their wake -- sometimes at the same time. These stormy petrels of primal chaos, these ravens of wisdom flown from [ultraterrestrial](#) battlefields, dart through the dark skies of myth and history in every age. In our age, they came to West Virginia, taking the forms of our own demons -- red-eyed monsters, mysterious strangers, and lights in the sky. And like all true monsters, the Mothman serves only as the portent of something greater and more terrible still, which we can only glimpse in fragments around his mighty wings and behind his unblinking eyes.

"'It was shaped like a man, but bigger,' Roger said later. 'Maybe six and a half or seven feet tall. And it had big wings folded against its back.' 'But it was those eyes that got us,' Linda declared. 'It had two big eyes like automobile reflectors.' 'They were hypnotic,' Roger continued. 'For a minute, we could only stare at it.'"

-- report of the first Mothman sighting, in *The Mothman Prophecies*, by John A. Keel

On November 15, 1966, two couples were out for a romantic evening parked in an abandoned ammunition plant near Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Near an old building, they saw two enormous red glows, which they thought were reflections of their headlights -- until the lights detached themselves from the doorway and began moving toward the car. Panicked, the couples drove away -- only to find themselves followed by the red-eyed thing, which flapped above them soundlessly at a speed of over 100 miles per hour! Over the next thirteen months, the eerie "Mothman" (as the papers dubbed the entity) appeared at least 25 more times, with hundreds of reports coming from the surrounding area. The Mothman sightings came on the heels of a UFO "flap" in the region, which had already attracted reporter John Keel. Keel met the UFO contactees, and began to receive his own elusive "ultraterrestrial" contacts, calling themselves "Mr. Apol" and "Indrid Cold," who delivered "prophecies" that were not so much inaccurate as they were malicious. Meanwhile, all around Point Pleasant cattle and pets vanished only to turn up mutilated, phony "census workers" asked about children's nightmares, and the Men In Black worked their curiously hapless efforts at extortion and silencing. An entire mythology flew in on Mothman's wings, combining modern telephonic oracles with archetypal winged demons.

"The rain stopped, the temperature of the air remained low and the mist appeared over the water. It was then that I saw the mark on the path that was very similar to a man's footprint. My dog Alpha bristled up, snarled, and then something rushed about nearby trampling among the bushes. However, it didn't go away, but stopped nearby, standing stock-still. We had been standing like that for some minutes . . . Then I stooped, picked up a stone and threw it towards the unknown animal. Then something happened that was quite unexpected: I heard the beating of wings. Something large and dark emerged from the fog and flew over the river. A moment later it disappeared in the dense mist. My dog, badly frightened, pressed itself to my feet."

-- V.K. Arsenyev, on a sighting in eastern Siberia on July 11, 1908

A six-foot tall gray-brown entity with thick legs, immense (ten-foot) soundless wings, and red, glowing eyes appeared in West Virginia in 1966. Another one appeared in New Jersey in 1909, the infamous "Jersey Devil" -- whose resemblance to our old friend [Spring-Heeled Jack](#) bears emphasis here. A "winged man" appeared over Brooklyn in 1877, and a "headless angel" appeared in Portugal in 1915; on the other end of the celestial scale an eight-foot winged "Satan" landed in a farmyard in Nebraska in 1922. Bat-winged "men" (with no visible arms, just like Mothman) appeared in 1948 in the UFO-rich skies of Washington state, and on November 21, 1963 in Hythe, Kent. Reports of evil cattle-mutilating "black birds" with red, glowing eyes abounded in Chile in the mid-1990s, related to the goat-sucking Chupacabra of Puerto Rico -- which, itself, has its own uncanny similarities to the [Beast of Gévaudan](#) of ill fame. Apparently, the Mothman is just one sample from of a cloud of cryptic witness, the myths blurring as the wings

beat too fast for terrestrial senses to follow.

"The government was fooling around with some experimental warfare technologies, testing the effects of various radiations and electromagnetic fields on a guinea pig population in this sleepy WV town. They'd emit large doses of whatever energy into the town, then sit back and observe pathology clusters, changes in crime rate, mortality, mental illness, and whatever other measurable changes might result from said exposure. What the investigators didn't count on was the attraction the EM activity might have for 'black dogs'."

-- from the unpublished notes of "Major Jack Downing," self-professed MIB

So, can we switch dimensions from the breadth of winged-entity reportage to some in-depth explanation of the Mothman madness? At the time, a local professor speculated that Mothman might be a sandhill crane, which shares color and size with the Mothman, and has two bright red spots on its forehead that might resemble eyes. Keel himself speculated that some Mothman sightings might have been large owls, whose eyes shine red in reflected light (although neither cranes nor owls chase cars).

For a slightly more *Atomic Horror* version, decaying chemicals poorly stored at the Point Pleasant TNT area might have mutated owls or sandhill cranes. Alternatively, they might have leaked into the water supply and let susceptible individuals hallucinate (or summon?) Mothmen and all the other phenomena of that bizarre year. The Men In Black might even have released the chemicals themselves, or engaged in some other bizarre mind-control experiment, as postulated in "Major Jack Downing's" note above. If the "Major's" explanation is correct, and experimental electromagnetic warfare techniques caused the Mothman panic, that presents an intriguing parallel with our 1908 Siberian case -- reported only two weeks after a massive explosion (Tesla's proto-[HAARP](#) EM release?) in [Tunguska](#). Could the "bleed-off" of the Tunguska explosion have spawned Mothmen to haunt our century with ever-increasing chaos and uncertainty?

"The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the beating of his wings."

-- John Bright, speech in the House of Commons (Feb. 23, 1855)

Some locals assumed the Mothman was only the most recent example of "Chief Cornstalk's Curse," leveled by the dying Shawnee leader in 1774 after a battle on the site that would become Point Pleasant twenty years later. Point Pleasant still boasts a striking obelisk as its "Cornstalk Monument," an acupuncture needle bottling up the death energy of the haunted West Virginia hillsides. But on December 15, 1967, exactly 13 months after the Mothman's first manifestation, that death energy loosed, along with the number 13 eyebar on the Silver Bridge between Point Pleasant and Kanauga, Ohio. The bridge gave way, dropping holiday shoppers and their cars into the freezing Ohio River, killing 47 people in the tragedy. As though the disaster blew some ultraterrestrial "safety valve," the Mothman vanished; Point Pleasant slowly returned to normal -- and to its mourning. The Mothman may have been a harbinger of the bridge's collapse, just as moths bring death in Italian folklore. Conversely, the psychic shock of the tragedy may have projected the Mothman back in time, a literal fore-shadowing of the trauma attendant on the breaking of the Silver Bridge.

"The moths are the heralds, or better yet, the guardians of eternity. . . . The moths have been the intimate friends and helpers of sorcerers from time immemorial . . . Moths are the givers of knowledge and the friends and helpers of sorcerers."

-- "Don Juan," in *Tales of Power* by Carlos Castaneda

Moths represent the spirits of the dead in Cornwall, and the soul in Greek legend. The Maya believed that moths were ghosts of dead warriors, returning to earth for some purpose. (Interestingly, the Cherokee believed that moths caused eye disease -- recalling the conjunctivitis epidemic that plagued Point Pleasant during the reign of the Mothman.) The bat-winged demons and butterfly-winged angels of medieval iconography also represent the post-mortem world with winged intruders; in areas as disparate as Scotland, Friesland, and Bosnia, moths are [witches](#) or [faeries](#), or both. In Westphalia, St. Peter's Day, February 22 (note the synchronistic date of John Bright's speech, above), is set aside for driving moths out of the house with incantations and hammer-blows. The Blackfoot say the moth brings news or knowledge from the afterworld, carried on its wings, while the Navaho and Yaqui know that the knowledge moths bring can give only madness and insanity. This could be the key to the Mothman's prophecies, ultraterrestrial

communiqués from fractured realities unleashed into the "window area" by UFOs or mysterious Teslan magics stored in abandoned Army plants. The messages the Mothman brings, like the prophecies of the Delphic oracles, are only understood in hindsight, looking back from the disaster in the light of two glowing red eyes.

Seers for In Nomine

by Jonathan Lang

Introduction

In Nomine goes to great lengths to draw contrasts between angels and demons, saying that demons are inherently selfish beings driven by Will, while angels are inherently selfless beings empowered by Perception. Furthermore, it goes on to describe sorcery as a discipline in which a supremely self-centered human bends the Symphony to his Will. A seer, then, would be a human who uses her Perception-based arts to communicate with the Symphony.

Seers and Sorcerers

Seers are often confused with sorcerers. It's easy to do, really; both seers and sorcerers practice arts that are heavily steeped in rituals, and both of the arts are strictly the domain of human practitioners. Indeed, there's a certain amount of overlap in the skills that each art makes available. Add the fact that most humans can't distinguish between sorcery, enchantment, and Songs, and the confusion is hardly surprising.

However, there are some significant differences between seers and sorcerers. While angels are immune to sorcery, they are generally not immune to soothsaying; fortunately, a seer's arts are usually less confrontational than sorcery, so angels who know the difference tend to be more lenient toward them.

The most fundamental difference between seers and sorcerers, however, lies in their respective attitudes. Sorcery is an inherently selfish art, and sorcerers are often loners as a result. Seers, on the other hand, are perceptive, which generally facilitates community and teamwork.

That said, it is possible in theory to be both a seer and a sorcerer. These "hybrids" are probably not even as common as Bright Lilim are, if they exist at all; the underlying attitudes probably conflict too much. But they are *possible*.

Seers and Prophets

Seers are also commonly confused with prophets; after all, both of them experience visions that are in some sense true. The most noticeable difference is that a seer's visions are self-induced, while a prophet has no control over his or her visions. A more subtle difference is that a prophet's visions are of Divine origin, while a seer's visions only might be.

Seers and the War

Seers are typically aligned with the ethereals; those who aren't are typically aligned with Heaven or unaffiliated. Very few seers actively support Hell; the requisite selfishness goes against their grain. Gabriel is the Heavenly patron of seers; those seers whom she personally Illuminates join the ranks of the Ignis (this is a subtle change from *Superiors 3: Hope and Prophecy*, where all Ignis are sorcerers). Blandine, Litheroy, and Yves are all supporters of seers, although Yves tends to be rather reserved about this; likewise, Dominic greatly dislikes seers (probably due to their all-too-common pagan beliefs), while David likes the way that they usually promote cooperation, and thus tends to tolerate them.

On the other side, Malphas is the most bitter enemy that seers have, for much the same reasons that David tolerates them; their potential to promote communication and cooperation runs directly counter to his Word. Kronos would love to corrupt seers as he has sorcerers, but thus far hasn't had much success overall. Nonetheless, individual seers are no more immune to their fates than anyone else is.

New Attunements

Second Sight

This attunement is only available to humans, and is further limited to humans with a minimum Perception of 6. It allows the human to perform soothsaying rituals, although rituals that require Essence expenditures can only be performed if the seer is Symphonically aware (making Symphonic Awareness virtually a requirement as well). Angels with the Illumination attunement can grant the Second Sight attunement, or it can be gained through the Vision Quest ritual.

Illumination

A Servitor Attunement of Gabriel, this allows the angel to grant the Second Sight attunement to a human without the need to go through a vision quest. Like its sorcerous counterpart, Infernal Pact, it still requires the human to spend 10 character points for the attunement -- or he may elect to become a Servant of the angel. However, the latter choice is rarely made. Unlike Infernal Pact, Illumination neither damns nor blesses the human.

Soothsaying Skills

Soothsaying skills follow the same game mechanics as sorcerous skills. Seers have access to the following skills:

Channeling

(Perception)

The ability to loan your body to a spirit as a host. Seers with this skill are greatly valued among spirits without vessels, as they provide a way for them to interact with the corporeal realm.

Communion

(Perception)

The ability to communicate with spirits, be they celestials, ethereals, or human souls.

Divination

(Perception)

Allows for scrying, object-reading, and predicting the future.

Focus

(Precision)

This skill is almost identical to its sorcerous counterpart; the only distinction is that they have slightly different sets of rituals. Focus is the only Soothsaying skill that doesn't affect angels or relievers. Seers can learn Focus rituals from sorcerers, and vice versa, with a few exceptions: seers can't use Sacrifice for Essence or Siphon Essence, and sorcerers can't use any of the new rituals listed here. Of course, the mythical sorcerous seer could learn them all . . .

Rituals

Channeling Rituals

Channel

(Channeling/Special)

This ritual enables a willing spirit of the seer's choice to possess her as per the Song of Possession. The level of the ritual is based on the spirit you wish to channel:

- Channeling ghosts, poltergeists, dream-shades, or ethereal spirits requires Channeling/1.
- Channeling relievers or demonlings requires Channeling/2, as does hosting ghosts, poltergeists, dream-shades, or ethereal spirits.
- Channeling angels or demons, or hosting relievers or demonlings, requires Channeling/3.
- Channeling ethereal spirits by name, or hosting angels or demons, requires Channeling/4.
- Channeling angels or demons or hosting ethereal spirits, by name, requires Channeling/5.
- Hosting angels or demons by name requires Channeling/6.

Hosting differs from channeling in that the host retains volition, mostly; treat it as per the Shedite resonance, but measured in minutes rather than days. Ethereal spirits, angels, and demons may be channeled or hosted by name if the seer knows their true name and her Channeling skill is high enough; subtract the check digit from the Essence cost in this case, with a minimum Essence cost of 1.

Finally, there are the legendary levels: at Channeling/7 or higher, it might be possible to channel a soul from Heaven or Hell -- although the latter wouldn't be advisable, as channeling an anguished soul is likely to have deleterious effects on the seer's sanity. It is impossible to channel or host a soul residing in the Higher Heavens; it is possible to channel souls from the Lower Hells, but stupid doesn't even begin to describe this stunt.

Time: 10 minutes

Essence: the the highest of the spirit's Corporeal, Ethereal, or Celestial Forces

Communion Rituals

Commune

(Communion/1-4)

This ritual allows the seer to attach a message to a bit of Essence and to send it to a spirit, much like the Celestial Song of Tongues; if two points of Essence are sent, the recipient may send one of them back as a reply, unless it's in Limbo.

Communing with minor ethereal spirits (8 or fewer Forces) is a Communion/1 ritual; relievers or demonlings require Communion/2; major ethereal spirits require Communion/3, and angels or demons require Communion/4.

Commune with Human Soul

(Communion/3)

This ritual works just like Commune, but with any human, dead or alive. Exceptions: souls in the Higher Heavens won't reply; souls in the Lower Hells can't; and the undead won't even receive the message. Humans who aren't aware of the Symphony won't know how to reply.

Time: one minute

Essence: 1 or 2

Invoke Superior

(Communion/6)

The seer can evoke an Archangel or Demon Prince by name; this is handled using the same mechanics as celestials invoking Superiors. This ritual must be learned separately for each Superior; the -10 penalty applies if the seer is using the wrong ritual.

Time: one minute

Essence: 3

Divination Rituals

See Celestial Form

(Divination/1)

This "ritual" lets the seer add Divination to her Perception when rolling to perceive a celestial form.

Time: instantaneous

Essence: none

Read History

(Divination/2)

Gives a vision about something in the subject's past; if the seer has a question in mind while performing the ritual, the vision will have something to do with that question. A CD of 1 shows something vaguely associated with the question, while a CD of 6 will be as close to a direct answer as is possible.

Time: one minute

Essence: The further into the past the vision can reach, the more Essence is required: 1 for hours, 2 for days, 3 for weeks, 4 for months, 5 for years, 6 for decades, 7 for centuries. The vision may not reach anywhere near that far in practice, but the Essence cost must be paid "in advance," as it were.

Foretell Future

(Divination/3)

Gives a vision about something in the subject's future. Note that Foretell Future only deals with what the future will be barring celestial interference.

Time: one minute

Essence: The further into the future the vision can show, the more Essence is required: 1 for minutes, 2 for tens of minutes, 3 for hours, 4 for days, 5 for weeks, 6 for months, 7 for years. The Essence cost is based on the seer's "best guess" as to how far in the future the vision will reach; if he or she doesn't provide enough Essence, the attempt automatically fails; if she provides too much, the ritual works as advertised, leaving the seer none the wiser.

Seeking

(Divination/4)

Similar to the Song of Affinity, but slower and (generally) more costly.

Time: 15 minutes

Essence: 1 if it is within yards of the seer, 2 if within tens of yards, 3 if hundreds of yards, 4 if miles, 5 if tens of miles, 6 if hundreds of miles, 7 if thousands of miles

Scrying

(Divination/5)

Lets the seer see a vision of the target and its surroundings.

Time: 15 minutes -- 2 * the check digit

Essence: 1 if it is within yards of the seer, 2 if within tens of yards, 3 if hundreds of yards, 4 if miles, 5 if tens of miles, 6 if hundreds of miles, 7 if thousands of miles

Read Aura

(Divination/6)

Works like the Elohite resonance when used on a human, showing each emotion as a different color; it also detects if the subject is Symphonically Aware, and the aura's intensity varies with the amount of Essence the subject has. When used on a vessel or host, the human sees the celestial form superimposed; ethereals appear as their "ethereal form."

Time: 15 minutes

Essence: check digit

New Focus Rituals

Sense Tether

(Focus/1-4)

This simple ritual detects Tethers. Detecting a stabilized Tether is a level 1 ritual; detecting an uncontrolled Tether requires Focus/2; detecting a Tether as it is being formed requires Focus/3; determining which (if any) Word(s) could acquire a Tether in the region requires Focus/4. The CD determines how much information the seer gains -- a 1 merely alerts her to its presence, while a 6 tells her exactly where it is, what Word (if any) it's controlled by, and what condition it's in.

Time: 30 minutes

Essence: check digit

Tap Tether

(Focus/2)

The seer may draw Essence from a Tether if she is in its locus; doing so will, however, alert the Seneschal to her presence. If successful, the seer gains Essence equal to two * the check digit. The exact elements of the ritual depend on the Tether in question -- choose one Rite appropriate for the Word associated with the Tether, whether or not the seer has that Rite.

Time: varies

Essence: 1

Buttress Tether

(Focus/5)

This ritual calls on the power of a Tether to weaken invaders. The CD of the ritual is a penalty to all actions (except leaving) taken by celestials serving hostile Words for as long as the seer maintains the ritual.

Time: 1 round

Essence: twice the check digit

Legendary Rituals

(Focus/6+)

At higher levels, it might be possible to actually traverse a Tether, traveling bodily to one of the other realms in much the same way that a Saint can. Ethereal Tethers would be easier to traverse than celestial Tethers, and the dangers of traversing an Infernal Tether go without saying.

Special Ritual

Vision Quest

(Special)

As per Sorcerous Initiation, except that a Perception roll is made instead of a Will roll.

Hardware that Hums, Software that Sizzles

Customizing your *GURPS* Computer

by Michael J. Daumen

Aaron flipped the case over with twitching fingers, trying hard to ignore how desperate he'd become. The last of his money and favors were sunk into this box; it, and the hope for one more score, were all he had now. Carefully, he opened the static-free cover, blowing gently to remove any dust. The chip gleamed beneath the overhead lights. Wired in his deck, it was the key which could set him free -- or seal his fate.

Computers in *GURPS* are defined by their Complexity rating, a catch-all number that reflects speed, capacity, size, and TL. The simplicity of Complexity is deceiving; one variable represents a wide variety in both devices and programs. But it is hard to introduce more character-computer interaction into the *GURPS* system without adding more statistics. With this in mind, here are some ideas for giving computer experts more to do in a campaign than hack-and-backslash.

How it all Works

The concept that makes it possible to squeeze more into a computer and out of a program is fractional Complexity. Expanding Complexity one decimal place -- 3.1, 4.9, and so on -- gives players the motivation to tinker with computers, and GMs the flexibility to introduce new hardware and software without increasing performance by factors of ten each time.

In hardware terms, an extra tenth of Complexity provides room to run one more program of Complexity-1, as per normal *GURPS* rules. For example, a computer of Complexity 4.1 can run two Complexity 4 and one Complexity 3 programs, or one Complexity 4 and eleven Complexity 3 programs. Characters get fractional increases by installing custom hardware into the computers they use.

In contrast to computer systems, optimized and custom programs have smaller Complexities, leaving more room in memory for other programs. Running a Complexity 4.9 program instead of a Complexity 5 program saves enough space for one additional Complexity 4 program in memory. Programmers get savings in Complexity by writing new software and modifying existing programs.

Despite the modifications made by these rules, computers and programs always operate at their original or "base" Complexity. When determining Complexity-derived effects such as skill levels (anything but the number of programs a computer can store), always round off to the nearest integer. To avoid confusion, the greatest improvement possible to either computers or programs is 0.4 -- preventing arguments about whether a Complexity of 4.5 should be treated as 4 or 5!

A Complexity increase/decrease of 0.1 is a Simple invention; a 0.2 increase is Average; 0.3 is Complex; and 0.4 Amazing (using the terms as they appear in the Gadgeteering rules in CII123). The difficulty of making these changes are represented by skill roll modifiers of 0, -2, -6 and -10 respectively.

Hardware Upgrades

Computer users planning an upgrade must first select the amount of Complexity to replace and the amount of fractional Complexity they are seeking. The former can be a number up to the computer's Complexity minus 1. For example, up to 6 points of Complexity can be modified for a Complexity 7 system. The benefit to be obtained from an

upgrade can vary from 0.1 to 0.4.

Of course, before a new part is installed, it must be available. It's possible to find the desired components for sale in the right market, or to requisition them from a supplier. Rummaging through unused or forgotten hardware is also possible -- in a cyberpunk environment this skill is a fine art! Characters with Scrounging can make a roll, subtracting the Complexity and TL of the desired component. Success means a part is available; whether the owner objects to its use is another matter.

Better hardware is designed using the **GURPS** rules for inventions (B186). Make the concept roll against the designer's Electronics (Computers)-3 or Engineering (Electrical Work)-6. The extra difficulty represents the fact that off-the-shelf components would have the latest refinements; if a modification were obvious someone would have already done it! Instead of the -15 penalty to the concept roll, subtract the operating TL, base Complexity, and the gadgeteering penalty for the amount of the improvement. A critical success does not count this modification towards the four maximum (see below); a critical failure means that the hardware in question is so integral to the computer that its Complexity cannot be modified in subsequent attempts.

Example: Aaron's fixer knows a student who thinks he has come up with a breakthrough in microchip architecture. He thinks he can build a chip which will replace 1 point of Complexity with 1.3. His Electronics roll is a 17, and Aaron finds out that his motherboard is so strangely configured that it cannot be removed without scrapping the whole deck. Because of this, the total amount of Complexity available for future attempts is reduced by 1 to 2 (of the possible 3 for a deck of Complexity 4).

For the assembly roll, subtract TL, gadgeteering penalty, and twice the replaced Complexity. A critical success allows the replaced Complexity to be used in subsequent attempts (while retaining the fractional bonus). Critical failure means that the faulty component looks fine, and can be installed without problems -- but it may eventually cause internal damage or system failure at the worst possible time

Example: Aaron asks a chipmaker to burn a faster coprocessor for his cyberdeck. After haggling the specs and cost, they decide that the component they need is Complexity 2 (of 4 total) and will increase his deck's Complexity by 0.1. The penalty to the conception roll is -3 (starting penalty), -8 (TL), and -4 (base Complexity), or -15. The penalty on the manufacturing roll is -3, -8, and -4 (twice the replaced Complexity), also -15. There is no gadgeteering penalty for the 0.1 increase since this is a Simple improvement. The engineer makes both rolls and delivers the merchandise into Aaron's greedy fingers.

Setting up the new hardware requires two rolls: an Electronics (Computers)/Engineering (Electrical Work)-3 roll (for the physical installation) and a Computer Programming roll (to resolve any compatibility problems between the new component and existing software). Subtract the working TL, the system's base Complexity, and the gadgeteering penalty, but add the amount of the Complexity which is being replaced. Both attempts require the use of a suitable tool kit or lab. While a critical success on an assembly roll makes a task shorter (see below), critical failures on these rolls can cause physical damage or data loss.

Example: Aaron wishes to rewire his cyberdeck with the new chip. To successfully upgrade his deck, he needs to make Electronics and Computer Programming rolls with a total penalty of -8 (TL), -4 (base Complexity), +2 (the Complexity replaced) -10 for each. His modified rolls are 6 and 13 -- although he installed the new component correctly, it creates a software glitch that must be resolved in another attempt.

A computer can be modified more than once, provided that at least 2 points of the system's original Complexity remain, and that critical failures have not made available points off-limits. Since the maximum amount of increase is 0.4, a system can only be modified no more than four times. This limit includes failed attempts and attempts by more than one engineer.

Example: Aaron has tried to modify his Complexity 4 cyberdeck twice. His first attempt involving 1 point of Complexity failed critically, while the second replaced 2 points with 2.1. He has 2 points of original Complexity remaining. But since one must never be replaced (by definition), and the other cannot be replaced (because of the critical failure), there's nothing left to customize. Had his first try not ended so badly, he would still have 1 point

available for one more upgrade. He's left with a deck of Complexity 4.1 that cannot be improved. Now it's time to look at his software

The cost and time to required to make upgrades can vary greatly. One rule of thumb is to have the base price equal to the replaced Complexity squared in thousands of dollars, subject to whatever other modifiers the GM thinks apply. Each action governed by a die roll takes (TL x Base Complexity x replaced Complexity x 60) minutes to resolve, divided by how much the roll succeeded -- so if Aaron succeeds by five on one roll, that step takes $(8 \times 4 \times 2 \times 60) / 5 = 320$ minutes. A critical success on the assembly rolls halves the time to perform each job.

Optimized Programs

Programmers can try to write new software with lower Complexity, or improve existing programs. The former requires more knowledge and time, since the program may delve into other fields of study; the latter may involve cryptanalysis and bypassing security routines just to examine the code! Customizing programs is cheaper than installing new hardware -- the cost is the purchase price of the program to edit, or the freelancer's fee.

New Software

Writing an optimized program from scratch uses the inventing rules at B186. A programmer can attempt to write entirely new software, or custom versions of existing programs. In addition to the concept and assembly ("compiling") rolls, the programmer (or his assistants with the relevant skills) must make success rolls for any other skills appropriate when creating a specialized program (a Personality Simulation requires the assistance of someone with Psychology skill, an Expert System requires an expert in the underlying knowledge skill, etc.).

Each roll is at -3, with the following modifiers: twice the program's base Complexity; and the penalty for the gadgeteering improvement (Simple to Amazing). As with hardware, a critical failure in the design stage means the programmer thinks the software he examined cannot be optimized; similar misfortune in the compiling stage means that he thinks the program is functional, when in reality it will eventually crash.

Example: After encountering polymorphic ice on a harrowing run, Aaron thinks he can incorporate some of its features into a Webster program (base Complexity 2), which should result in an improved Complexity of 1.7. This 0.3 improvement is Complex, carrying a -6 penalty. The GM mercifully decides that his familiarity with the Net is sufficient to not require any other skill rolls, but since he has no access to Webster software he needs to write one off the top of his head. The penalties to his rolls are -3 (the normal penalty), -4 (twice the base Complexity of a Webster program), and -6 (Complex task) or -13 total.

Version 2.0

Instead of writing new software, Characters with Computer Programming skill can try to improve existing programs. Getting to the actual code can be difficult; erstwhile pirates will first need to detect and bypass security measures. A Computer Hacking roll, minus the program's base Complexity, reveals any such safeguards. A second roll, either Computer Hacking or Cryptanalysis (if the program is encrypted) at the same penalty will circumvent the protection -- unless the GM uses more sophisticated rules for this type of activity.

The penalties for writing from scratch apply as well to optimization. Programs can only be modified once, unless someone achieved a critical success during a previous edit. In either case, the gadgeteering penalty is based on the reduction in the program's original Complexity, as opposed to its current Complexity. For example, improving a program from 4.7 to 4.6 is just as difficult as going from 5 to 4.6, since the designer probably used his best tricks in a previous rewrite.

Example: Looking to free up some disk space, Aaron prints out his deck's Success program and pores over it for extraneous bytes. Its current Complexity is 2.9, the result of a lucky all-nighter a few months back. After several pots

of coffee, Aaron bets he can shave another tenth off to a new size of 2.8. The penalties to his roll are -3 (the usual penalty), -6 (twice the base Complexity of 3) and -2 (from 3 to 2.8 is a 0.2 improvement, an Average task) for a total of -11. On a critical success he may make yet another attempt in the future.

Other Applications?

These rules were intended as incentive to seek advantages over opposing hackers, by using computer-related skills as opposed to combat. However, they can easily cover repairing damaged hardware or corrupt files. If the amount of physical destruction can be expressed as an amount of Complexity, and the extent of rebuilding as a gadgeteering task, the hardware customization rules can be applied verbatim.

Example: Aaron's deck is damaged by gunfire, after narrowly escaping from goons in an internet cafe. Campaign house rules state that 10 points of damage destroys 1 point of Complexity. His deck took 34 points of damage, so he needs to replace 3.4 points of Complexity. Some of it is garden-variety circuitboard, wires and plastic casing, which the GM decides is easy to find and replace -- 1.3 points of Complexity and a Simple task. The remaining 2.1 points was his new chip. Aaron sighs, and ducks out his back door to see his fixer once more.

Complexity may also describe components or systems in other fields, allowing players to improve and repair them in the same fashion. Automotive parts in an Autoduel setting, jump drives in *GURPS Traveller*, and security systems in an espionage campaign are three obvious candidates for this treatment (although at higher TLs the GM may wish to remove the -3 penalty to every roll). GMs must decide what bonuses fractional Complexity provides, and assign Complexity ratings to whole systems and component parts. Then mechanics and hackers alike will have more things to do during the down time between adventures.

Exercise T

A Scenario for *Ogre*

by David Morse

Introduction

"Exercise T" is another virtual war between *Ogre* AIs. It is for any number of players, but especially three. Also, if a player is late, he may join in even after the game has started. Thus, "Exercise T" is an ideal party game.

Players get waves of forces. When all units of a wave are wiped out, the next wave is eligible to enter.

Setup

"Exercise T" uses strictly *Ogre* rules and units; access to GEV is not necessary.

Use the *Ogre* map. Place a command post on the board at hex 0808. Units may not leave the map. Hex row xx16 and south is impassable.

Players seat themselves around the table, then randomly determine which player will go first. Play proceeds counter-clockwise. When a late player arrives, randomly seat them between existing players.

Player Forces

A player's first wave consists of 2 GEVs, 2 heavy tanks, and 2 missile tanks. A player's second wave consists of an *Ogre* Mk III.

When all units of a wave are destroyed, the next wave will enter.

Also, players may use the command post to radio for additional reinforcements. These units are not part of a wave and do not inhibit the entry of a successive wave.

Player Entry



When a wave of units enters, randomly determine their entry hex from the diagram at right. All units enter from that hex, on this turn, paying 1 MP to enter. Mark the entry hex as *busy*. No other waves may enter from that hex for two full turns after you use it as an entry point. Thus in a 7+ player game, only 6 players will participate in the first two turns; the others have to wait for an entry point to free up before coming in. If there are hostile forces in the entry hex, units may instead enter from the first unoccupied clockwise hex.

The Command Post

The command post may not be targeted. Units may not end in the same hex as, nor move through, the command post. The CP can't be destroyed by player action. Unfortunately, at the end of turn ten it is destroyed due to a software bug in its not-exploding subsystem.

After turn two, the command post may be used to call for reinforcements. At the beginning of a player's turn, if he has one or more unit adjacent to the command post he *may* radio for reinforcements. Roll a die and consult the table below for the type of reinforcement(s). Normally a player gets a single unit, however if the player is the only one controlling units adjacent to the CP, he gets *three* units of the type rolled. The reinforcements enter that turn from a randomly determined non-busy entry point. This does not make that entry point busy. In the unlikely event that all entry points are busy, you get no unit, but get to cash the unit in for freebie victory points at the usual rate: either six or eighteen.

Roll Reinforcement

1	Heavy Tank
2	Heavy Tank
3	Missile Tank
4	Missile Tank
5	GEV
6	GEV

If insufficient numbers of miniatures (or counters) of a given armor type are not available, don't sweat it; just roll again.

Ending the Game

It's a battle to the bitter end.

Victory

The object of the game is to score the most victory points. Victory points are scored for inflicting damage on enemy units, and lost for surrendering.

When units you control surrender, subtract their VP value from your score.

Firing Ogre missiles (and cruise missiles) does not cost VP; however, if they're shot down, the player that shoots them down gets standard VP.

When rams occur, only the ramming player gets VP. *Example:* A Mk III rams a Heavy tank, and destroys it. The attacker gets 6 VP for smushing the tank. The defender does not get 2 VP for destroying the 2 points of Ogre treads.

For purposes of scoring in this game, Ogres are just collections of their aggregate parts. There is no bonus score for dealing the finishing blow to an Ogre.

The winner is the player with the most points. Second and third place are also desirable.

Special Rules

Surrender

Units may surrender at the beginning of their controller's turn, right after disabled units undisable. Units from the last wave may not surrender. Surrendered units are removed from play immediately.

Disabled units may not surrender; they're too stunned.

If the last unit of a wave surrenders on a given turn, the player is eligible to enter with his next wave on that very turn.

Surrender is normally only important in the advanced scenario, where there is the possibility for immobilized Mk III Ogres being left to rot in order to stymie the entry of the third wave.

No Suicide

Players may not target their own units. Even if they do manage to somehow destroy themselves, they don't gain VP, they lose them.

No Ogre Antipersonnel

In most versions of "Exercise T" there are no infantry. In these versions cost-conscious Ogre engineers have removed the extraneous AP guns from all Ogres.

Advanced scenario

As per the regular rules above, but players receive a third wave. Each may choose one entry from the table below:

Gunslinger	Ogre Mk V
Speed Demon	Ogre Mk IV

Missile Monger Fencer-B

Horde Master Ogre Mk III-B, 2 × GEV, 2 × HVY, 2 × MSL

The Command Post does not explode until turn fifteen.

GEV variant

This variant is for players with more expertise, and is usually combined with the advanced scenario.

Use the **GEV** map instead. Use **GEV** rules, including overruns. Entry points are named in the table below. Place the CP in hex 1211. All bridges and towns are intact. No **GEV** optional rules are used. The initial armor may be of any type their controller wishes: players may take up to 36 VP worth of armor and/or infantry, including cruise missile crawlers.

Roll Entry

1	0401
2	2304
3	2315
4	1822
5	0422
6	0112

Reinforcements should consult this table instead:

Roll Reinforcement

1	Heavy Tank
2	2 × Light Tank
3	Missile Tank
4	GEV
5	2 × LGEV
6	Superheavy Tank!

If a player is the undisputed master of the CP, instead of getting the usual triple reward he receives a fully loaded cruise missile crawler.

If a cruise missile detonates because of being shot down, the intercepting player gets all the VP, except for any losses he himself sustains, which go to the cruise missile owner.

Ogre Engineer Variant

Players may design their armor units and Ogres using [the Cobb formulas](#).

Strategy Notes

Try to centralize your forces. it's a game of exploiting opportunities, and the center offers the most of them.

Armor and Ogre main batteries are usually the best targets, because they're worth the most VP. Ogre-to-Ogre rams are quite profitable as well.

In most **Ogre** scenarios, when your forces are destroyed you have fewer forces. That is not the case in "Exercise T" -- for most of the game, the faster your forces die, the faster your forces improve! That's not to say you should brazenly endanger your forces, but you should strive to exchange them for a modest number of victory points. In other words: Have fun and be violent!

Benny Mawr: The True King of Baltimore

For *Unknown Armies*

by Thom Marrion

Summary: Benny Mawr is a homeless man in his late fifties with a tangled beard, long brown dreadlocks streaked with gray, and the dark tan of someone who has been spending most of the last few years outdoors. He has the muscular physique of a former athlete, that he has managed to keep despite his present situation as a homeless man living on the streets. He has the words "veni, vidi, veci" tattooed on his right bicep.

Benny has only the vaguest memories of his existence before he became the True King of Baltimore. There was a war in a far away jungle, and he might have done some terrible things there. He had a wife, and she had an affair with his best friend. He might have killed them, but he doesn't really think that happened. He had a son who he is pretty sure that he killed. It was self-defense, but he doesn't remember the exact circumstances. He spent years wandering across the country. He believes that he meet the God of Wine and barely managed to escape with his life. He also remembers meeting a Bad Man, and having entered some kind of deal with him.

All of these memories are muddled, he doesn't even remember his name from that time. His current memories start from when he woke up in Druid Hill Park in 1993. (The year might have numerological significance. $1+9+9+3 = 22$, $2+2 = 4$. The number four represents memory in the Kabbalah and the Emperor in the Tarot. Then again, it might just be a remarkable coincidence.) He had dreamed of an old man wearing a crown, who walked with a cane and carried a sword. The old monarch limped up to Benny and touched the flat of his blade to Benny's shoulder. The king then proclaimed, "Thou art Benimawr, king of this realm. Rule the City well, as I have tried to rule her."

Benny woke up in the dewy grass, the morning sun having just risen, with his scepter in one hand and a bloody knife in the other. In his pockets he had \$235, a street map of Baltimore, and a dog-eared paperback copy of Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain. Such was the humble beginning of King Benny's reign.

Benny Mawr has since become a local fixture in Baltimore. He wanders the streets helping out his subjects whenever he can. He has stopped muggings, helped old ladies across the street, and once even managed to rescue two kids from a burning building. This has given him a positive reputation on the streets of Baltimore. He is still considered loony as a three-dollar bill, but it is a harmless kind of loony. He helps when he can and most of the people in the city who encounter him consider him to be good luck.

The City of Baltimore is his Land. Events that occur beyond the city limits in Baltimore County are beyond his jurisdiction. King Benny also has twelve Followers, all of whom are former gang members. Each one tried to get the better of what they thought was just some Crazy Homeless Guy. They were defeated by a King and are now fiercely loyal to him. Use the Stock Thugs on page 211 of the *Unknown Armies* book for their statistics.

Personality: (Leo) Born leader.

Obsession: The city he rules as True king.

Wound Points: 60

Passions

Rage Stimulus: People who do not appreciate all that his city has to offer.

Fear: (Self) That all this occult phenomenon and symbolic king stuff is really just in his own mind. That maybe he is nothing more than a crazy old homeless person.

Noble: Protecting his city from those who threaten it.

Stats

Body: 60 (Tough Guy)
Speed: 55 (S) (Pretty Fast)
Mind: 45 (Not Quite All There)
Soul: 80 (A Noble Spirit)

Skills

Body Skills: Brawling 35%, Disease Resistance 20%, Feat of Strength 20%, General Athletics 15%
Speed Skills: Drive 15%, Dodge 40%, Guns 35%
Mind Skills: General Education 15%, Notice 30%, Street Survival 30%
Soul Skills: Avatar: The True King 75%, Charm 15%, Lie 15%, **Urbanomancy 75%**

Notes: All Urbanomancy Cherries are Brainstorm, and any information given by the GM always relates to the City of Baltimore.

Because of the combination of Urbanomancy and the True King Avatar, Benny has no need of casting the formula spell My Turf. Being the True King already establishes his magical dominance over the City of Baltimore.

Madness Meter

Violence Unnatural Helplessness Isolation Self

5 Hard	7 Hard	4 Hard	5 Hard	1 Hard
2 Failed	4 Failed	1 Failed	3 Failed	3 Failed

Possessions: A wardrobe made of clothing found in thrift stores and dumpsters, this includes an army parka with the Virgin Mary painted on the back (thus symbolically representing Mary-land and also reminiscent of the Shield that the True King Arthur was said to carry in battle). A wooden scepter topped with an oriole feather, a raven feather, and the shell of a crab (all symbolizing the city of Baltimore). A cap from the *USS Constellation* which has a huge ragged hole in the top (thus forming a cloth crown).

Connections: The local police know about King Benny and generally leave him alone. He generally gets a warmer reception from poorer neighborhoods like Pigtown or Canton than he does at the upscale shops around Inner Harbor. Many of the local criminals have a superstitious fear of the old man. The Traffic Accident Blast Spell was once used to shut down a heroin smuggling operation in 1997, and there are still confused accounts of this incident circulating among the criminal underground.

Adventure Seeds: Any actions that Adept takes in Baltimore are going to be noticed by that city's King. This can either give the Player Characters a new ally or a powerful foe, depending on what they are trying to do and how it affects the city. In particular, any Cliomancers who are trying to get a charge from the *USS Constellation* or house where Edgar Allen Poe died are going to have a Avatar/Adept to contend with.

The PCs might have to come to the King's rescue. Though most of the city thinks of him as a amicable street person, he has caused the occasional magical havoc. The way he shut down the heroin operation is a good example of that. This has not escaped the Sleeper's attention. They don't care if magic is used to do good works if that magic starts coming to the attention of the Sleeping Tiger.

Finally, what was the deal that Benny made with the Bad Man? The party might be sent to collect from the king if they are trying to gain something from the Bad Man themselves.

Pyramid Review

Star Wars Trading Card Game: Attack of the Clones (Two-Player Starter Set)



Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Richard Garfield

Two-Player 60-card Starter Set: \$9.95; 11-card Booster Pack: \$3.29; 5-card Booster Pack: \$1.49

It has been a few weeks since the release of *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. Along with the much-anticipated film have come a massive deluge of merchandise. Wizards of the Coast wanted to be among the first to seize the opportunity to cash in on this enterprise, so they called in their best. Designer Richard Garfield (of *Magic: The Gathering* fame) was called upon to design the new *Star Wars Trading Card Game*. Garfield and his team opened themselves to the light side of the force and designed a quick-moving action game.

But first, let's get one point out of the way: The good news for the many *<ahem>* fans of Jar Jar is that he made it into the card game. The good news for the Jar Jar haters out here is that according to the [card list](#) offered by Wizards of the Coast, Jar Jar Binks is a rare card.

There are only five types of cards in the entire game. Each type of card has a unique color assigned to it. The purple-bordered cards are character cards that feature some familiar characters as well as some new characters from the current film. Some of these characters have special combat abilities, and they all have speed, power and health stats. Ground unit cards have a green border and feature droids, walkers, infantry units, etc. The same kind of stats are repeated on the ground (and space) units. Blue borders represent the space units. The abilities of the cards (logically) reflect their movie counterparts; the Naboo and Droid Fighters are fast and do a minor amount of damage, while the larger units are slow and do the largest amount of damage.

The orange-trimmed Mission cards can be "built" during a special phase. One mission card allows a player to remove damage counters from a unit. Another mission allows a player to search his deck for a card. Each mission varies in its cost and effectiveness.

Battle cards are red-trimmed. Many of them deflect or increase damage. Most cost "Force points" to play. Each turn, each player gains four such points. Unused Force points roll over into the next turn phase.

The basic two-player starter set is intended to be a simple introduction to the game, and it is exactly that. Players can use the included playmat and play a simple version that is just a touch more complex than "Go Fish" or some other childhood game. The simplified version of the game focuses on simple combat, which is just dice-rolling and card-turning. It was a good method of learning the combat system, but most players will quickly grow bored with it.

The combat system is short and sweet. Between the two players are the three distinct arenas: space, ground, and character arenas. Beginning with the Space arena, both players compare the speed statistic of each unit card in that particular arena. The fastest unit gets to attack first. (If there is a tie, the Dark Side Player gets to do his attacks first.) The attacking player taps his card and declares a target card on the opposing side. He then rolls a number of dice equal to the power statistic of the attacking card. Each four, five, or six that is rolled counts as a hit. The attacked player places damage counters equal to the number of "hits" that were rolled on the attacked unit. If the number of "hits" is equal to or higher than the attacked card's "health" then that card is considered destroyed and is discarded. Play moves on to the next attacking unit (in order of the Speed statistic) until all units in that arena are already tapped. Then all

battles in the ground arena are fought, followed by all battles in the character arena. When all of the units present are tapped, the turn is over. If a player has units in an arena where the other player has no units, then he controls that arena. When a player controls two of the three arenas, the game is over.

Some units have a special "critical hit" ability. This critical hit ability allows players to do extra damage if at least one six is rolled. For example, a character with Critical hit: 2 on his card would do two more "hits" should his attack roll contain a six. This is not cumulative; you can only earn one such bonus per attack.

Players get the opportunity to "build" units in hopes of getting them into play. Each turn, the Light Side player rolls one die to determine the number of build points which both players will have to use. A player can lay these cards down, face down, in the build "zone" by placing a build point on it. This is a great mechanic that serves as an equalizer because both players will get the same amount of build points. Any time a unit has a number of build points applied to it that is equal to its cost, it is placed in the appropriate arena. If it is a mission, its effects will come into play.

Building decks is always a challenge for any trading card game. Wizards of the Coast offers Booster Packs in two sizes to help players expand their set at their own pace. One of the booster packs has 11 cards and retails for \$3.29 while the other booster packs contain only five cards and retails for \$1.49. Players may only opt to build Light Side or Dark Side decks. Each deck may not include cards from the opposite side, though there are a number of neutral cards which fit into either deck. The pre-constructed starter decks retail for \$9.99.

Those who chose to purchase the two-player basic starter set will get a real bargain. The set comes with two decks which have 30 cards each. Also included are a colorful playmat, six small six-sided dice, cardboard damage and Force counters, and a colorful rulebook. Many players will probably quickly lose the tiny damage counters or opt for other counters that don't blend into the artwork on the cards. Overall, the set is designed to ease the player into the rules with a minimal amount of effort, and it certainly accomplishes that.

While the game itself is fast-paced and exciting, it did not capture the swashbuckling adventure feel of the movies. I never felt that Anakin was particularly strong (in fact, I killed him easily in just about every game). No lightsabers flash (except the battle card "Padawan's Deflection") no blasters singe my hair, and I don't leap out of a moving speeder. There are no weapons to attach to characters to protect them or make them stronger. The game is a fine game, but comes across like a sputtering lightsaber that refuses to ignite. It falls short of the glory because it fails to adequately capture the excitement, humor, and true spirit of adventure which is so prevalent in all of the films.

--*David Wilson*

Pyramid Pick

Diceland: Deep White Sea



Published by [James Ernest Games](#)

Created by James Ernest

Illustrated by Eduardo Müller

\$14.95

(It helps if you have an 8-sided die in hand for this review.)

Diceland: Deep White Sea is the first edition of a game that describes itself as, "...[A] unique concept in tabletop gaming: a quick and physical combat game using colorful paper dice." This a succinct summary of the new game designed by James Ernest, published under his "James Ernest Games" label rather than through Cheapass Games. This is not surprising, as the production values for *Diceland* match those of the color version of *Falling* and of *Girl Genius: The Works*. Inside the flat-pack brightly colored envelope-box can be found a full color rules sheet and 25 sheets of light card. Each, of these sheets contains the two parts that need to be punched out, scored, folded, and assembled to create a single glossy, full-color, 8-sided die or octahedron, that is also surprisingly sturdy. Every die is illustrated by the highly attractive comic book style art of Eduardo Müller.

This die is actually a character on the frozen world that has been thrown into an icy state by orbital decay, thus causing the collapse of the civilization. Now small factions squabble over the remains of that civilization, employing both magic and technology to help them win. Five factions have discovered the location of the almost legendary gigantic ship known as the Icebreaker, adrift for centuries in the "Deep White Sea" of this planet's polar region. To each faction or army it represents untold wealth and a potential improvement in their arms and equipment . . . so it is worth fighting for! *Diceland: Deep White Sea* provides five characters for each of these five factions, so that although the rules are written with just two players in mind, there is nothing to stop it being played by up to five instead. That said, a basic two-player game only takes twenty minutes, so expect multi-player games to last anything up to twice as long.

Diceland: Deep White Sea gives only the most the basic of details upon each of the factions, but more information upon each of the factions and their characters can be found on the *Diceland* website at www.diceland.com/. Also included is strategy information for playing both the game and each of the characters, as well as guidelines for tournament play.

Play in *Diceland: Deep White Sea* is really quite simple. Dice are thrown onto the table, from where they are maneuvered so that they can shoot their opponents or use special effects. Once killed, a die is removed from the table and goes into reserve, where it remains out of play for a full turn, after which it can be returned to a player's hand and thus rolled onto the table once again. Killing a die earns a player points -- anywhere from five to eight -- and the first player to 50 points in a two-handed duel is the winner.

Almost like a Cheapass Game, *Diceland: Deep White Sea* does require one or two components beyond the given contents -- in this case, a few counters or tokens to denote when a die is poisoned, and a table. Specifically, this table must be of a decent size, free of obstacles and covered with a non-slip surface, as the dice roll better, instead of sliding. The rules suggest vinyl, felt, or a tablecloth as a suitable surface, although a pool or snooker table works rather well.

The dice themselves are roughly two-inches long on each triangular face and each one seats very neatly into the hand

for throwing. Every die face is slightly different, with the uppermost -- as on a normal 8-sided die -- being the one in play. A face contains a lot of information. In the corners are one or more directions in which a die can see and attack, how much damage it does, plus movement and damage dots. These indicate which corner needs to be pushed (gently) down upon to change the face when a die takes damage or its player decides to move it. To one side are the numbers indicating the die's side number and its current shield strength. At the bottom are the die's character name and a special effect that can be used instead of an ordinary attack. Finally, and only on the last and weakest face -- marked with a "1" -- extra information gives that die's class, such as Assassin, Commander, Fighter, Mechanic, Robot, Sharpshooter, and Wizard, and their team. In some cases the various characters have more than one class, with most armies have a mixture of these classes. Again, these classes are fully defined in detail on the website.

In each turn a player first checks for both "Continuous Effects" and "Poison" before taking a single action. This action can either be throwing, moving, or shooting a single die. A player stands at least a whole foot away from the table and lobs a die from their hand onto the table, such that it lands face up; if it rolls off the table or lands with a corner off the edge, or lands leaning against another die or obstacle, it goes back into the hand. You cannot knock an opponent's die off the table in this manner, but can hit them and possibly force a face change. Once it lands a die can shoot or activate a die's special ability.

To move a die, a player simply pushes down on a corner with a movement dot. By doing so, a die changes face and direction, as well as all of its abilities. Again, once a die moves in this way it can shoot or activate its special ability.

To shoot, a player checks the die to see if there are any opponents within sight, then the range of its shot. This can be short, long or all-range, but no tape measure is required; range in *Diceland* is not exact, but only relative. If the damage dealt by a die is equal or greater than the shield value of the target die, then that die is killed; if the damage is less than the shield value, the target takes one step of damage and the red dot is pressed down upon to change it to a weaker face. Some shields have a colored background that indicate an immunity to an effect or attack of that color -- Ice Blue indicates an immunity to cold-based attacks such as Freeze, Red against Fireballs and Lasers, and so on.

Alternatives to shooting are a range of special effects. All characters possess a few of these, including Poison, which continues to inflict damage to the target until it is repaired; Command, which allows a die to get any other dice from their army on the table to take an action (is in addition to their actions during a player's turn); and Confuse, which enables a player to force a target to move in any direction, including ones that do not have a movement dot in their corner! Some dice also have optional effects, such as Backstab; Jump -- literally picking up that you have just thrown onto the table and re-throwing again . . . if you dislike where it has landed and you can do it again and again, so long as Jump comes up on the face; and Call Ally, allowing a player to throw another die from their hand -- but not from their reserve -- onto the table. Some effects are continuous, such as Hold, which stops a target from moving, but still allows them to shoot or Freeze, which prevents both movement and shooting.

Diceland: Deep White Sea is both fast and easy to play. The only complexity comes in learning the various effects and working out how to apply them to the dice on the table. Fortunately everything is fully explained on the rules sheet, including some solid examples, so sorting any problems out is actually not that complex. In effect, this is a skirmish game where positioning, facing, and the face in play are important, but actual range is only relatively so. It is tactical in trying to get a die into the position that you want with a roll, but usually random in how and where it lands. The game then becomes more tactical when figuring when and what to shoot at . . . This makes it both fun and levels the possible skill between the players, which can often be a problem in other games.

If I have a real complaint about *Diceland: Deep White Sea*, it is that storage is something of a problem; as taking the dice apart would damage them. That said, the reason that a large box is not provided is one of cost, and if you are really desperate, one can be found for sale on the website. Alternately, a sturdy biscuit or cookie tin will do the trick . . .

There are similarities between *Diceland* and several games, including *Magic: The Gathering*, TSR's *Dragon Dice*, WizKids' *MageKnight* games and Cheapass' own *Button Men*, but *Diceland: Deep White Sea* has a flavor all of its own. Further, the concept has lots of potential, much like *Button Men*, so that sets can be derived from other media and intellectual properties. Already there is a set coming out for the *Girl Genius* comic and one based upon the

spaceships found in the Cheapass' computer game, *Strange Adventures in Infinite Space*. This is all in addition to the first expansion set will add new characters and armies to *Deep White Sea*, which will allow players to build and customize their armies.

Penultimately, it should be should be pointed out that in addition to being fun and being a clever design upon the use of the octahedron or 8-sided die, Diceland: *Deep White Sea* represents excellent value for money in providing five different armies, almost ready to play and without the need for players to buy their own set in order to participate.

Finally, cats like *Diceland* too . . . but they're really bad players.

--*Matthew Pook*

Place-Setting With Kitchen Utensils and Hamsters

Over in the [newsgroups](#), Robert Rodger asked, "How about some advice on actually using locations in play?"

Ask and ye shall receive! (Unless you want money . . . or a liver . . . or, really, anything other than a lame column.) Here are some pointers for putting the advice from [last week](#) to good use. Your mileage may vary, of course, but they've certainly worked for *me*.

The Prime Rule: Setting is omnipresent.

What does this mean? Well, if a goal of an encounter is to emphasize the setting, then it's important to make sure that it affects (or *could* affect) all aspects of that encounter.

For example, let's say you're at an unfamiliar supermarket. Think about what it would be like to *be* there. If you were meeting someone there, think about how difficult it might be to find him; think about how easy it would be for someone else to see you . . . then slip away. If you were looking for something hidden there, think about how difficult it would be to find, how many random places there are. If you were looking for something *dangerous* hidden there, think about the ramifications of failure. If you were involved in a combat, think about what complications are possible: Narrow aisles would restrict maneuverability; columns of food could be pushed (or knocked) over; random objects -- bags of rice, eggs, kitchen utensils -- could be incorporated into the battle. In short, when you're in a supermarket, almost anything you do is reflected by that environment. The same principle applies when you're at a science fiction convention, in a rowboat, or atop a swaying bridge over a pool of lava.

If you don't *know* (or can't figure out or imagine) what effects a setting is going to have on an encounter, you probably shouldn't use that setting. If you can't fully wrap your mind what it's like to have an encounter in a western bar, then don't try to incorporate that setting heavily into the game. (Hints: Lots of noise. Sawdust on the floor. Fairly dim lights. Wooden floors with wooden tables and wooden chairs. A mechanical bull. *Both* kinds of music.)

Incorporation

Okay; now that you've got a sense of how a setting can affect a scene, what do you *do* with that knowledge? Well, you make sure you work it into the game.

"You know the microfiche is hidden in the collar of one of the animals; unfortunately, you don't know which one, and it's a large pet store. As you're contemplating what to do, two large gentlemen enter the shop and look around, ringing the bell on the door and sending the parrots near the front into a squawking frenzy. They seem to be looking around for something, but haven't seen you yet, although they *are* blocking the only known way in and out of the building. The clerk cracks her gum and looks nervous; she closes the mice-filled cage on the counter, delaying the pythons' meal for another few minutes. What do you do?"

"It's after hours and the recording studio is nearly empty; the only person in the control room is a young man slumped over the controls . . . unconscious or dead. His hand is lying across the tape control buttons, and they ch-chak-ch-chak-ch-chak continuously as they try to release. International recording star Anita Ipya is in the soundproof booth. You can't hear each other, but she's hitting the Plexiglas separating you in a panic . . . this is probably due to the dark gas filling her room. The door to the booth seems to be locked. What do you do?"

In these examples, it's very difficult for players (and thus characters) *not* to take setting into account.

Don't just rely on the setup to carry itself along; make sure you emphasize the setting as the scene continues:

"Your blow knocks the first guy against the hamster cage, smashing it open. There are now glass and woodchips on the ground, and two dozen hamsters running around."

"You manage to pull the body away from the controls. It seems that he's merely unconscious. His body was covering a microphone with a button marked 'To Booth.' You determine that you *can* throw a chair at the Plexiglas, but are unsure if it will cause any harm to the unconscious engineer . . . *or* Ms. Ipya."

Rules

Although it can rely on arbitrary decision making (which some groups dislike), creating rules on the fly dealing with the environment you've fabricated is another great way to drive the setting of the scene home.

"Dr. Castrato is awfully close to the edge of the building. If anyone is making any thrusting or piercing attacks, let me know if you fail the roll by five or more."

"The air is really thin on this mountain ledge . . . especially as you're trying to decipher the runes on the side of the door that goes into the precipice. Everyone give me an Endurance roll to see how you're handling the altitude."

If the players *still* don't get into it, consider having the antagonists use the scene *against* them.

"The scientist falls down on the beach, and throws a handful of sand into your face. If you fail a Dexterity roll, your next turn is spent blind."

"The woman runs through the revolving door and thrusts her umbrella against the door; the entire revolving door mechanism jams, making that means of exiting much more difficult."

If the bad guys make a point of using the scene to their advantage, the heroes may well start doing the same thing.

Maps!

Even the quickest map jotted on a sheet of paper will do wonders to make a scene come alive.

Here are maps for our pet store and recording studio from above.

Pet Store

Each took less than five minutes to jot down (and it no doubt shows). But, depending on your group, these scratch-drawn maps could do wonders to let players know where their heroes are positioned, what their surroundings are, where they can go, how they can use their environment, and so on.

In my games I'll generally draw a fairly big scratch map without any PCs or NPCs on there, then I'll place glass counters to represent NPCs on the map ("The blue ones are lower-level goons, the white ones appear to be the leaders, and the red ones are innocent victims . . . er, *bystanders*."). After that, I'll make the players put down markers to represent where *they* are in the setting. That way not only is everyone on the same page as to location, but they also what is -- and isn't -- possible. ("Okay; *how* are you going to get by your teammates to attack him? The bridge is only wide enough for two abreast . . .") Of course miniatures often work even better, but a lot of folks don't like dealing with them in fast-and-furious encounters.

The nice thing about cheap quick maps is that you can make them dynamic. "Okay; the hamster cage is broken <scribble out hamster cage> and lots of hamsters are running around <dot> <dot> <dot> <dot> as are the gerbils <dot with tail> <dot with tail> <dot with tail> . . ."

Now, nicely drawn (or computer-generated) maps look even cooler . . . but most of us simply don't have time. But we *all* have time to jot down a quickie map before (or during) an exciting scene.

Timelines, or Random Effects

One of the difficulties in using a setting is that it can be very difficult to come up with interesting ways the setting affects the scene on the fly. One way around this is to come up with either a timeline of events (assuming the sequence of action isn't thwarted), or a list of other events that might happen.

So let's look at our two examples again:

Pet store -- Things That Might Happen

- Missed attacks release pets: hamsters, snakes, fish (and LOTS of water!)
- Random shoppers arrive and get caught up in melee
- Birds start making a lot of noise, serving as distraction (good or bad)
- Bags of pet food spill open, creating a movement hazard

Recording studio

- *Turn 1*: Poisonous gas starts filling booth
- *Turn 6*: Ms. Ipya smashes a stool against the Plexiglas, to little avail
- *Turn 9*: Ms. Ipya falls unconscious from its effects
- *Turn 11*: Tape snaps at control station, possibly destroying evidence
- *Turn 13*: "Custodian" arrives from left door (actually a spy to make sure singer dies)
- *Turn 19*: Ms. Ipya dies.

Again, neither type of list needs to be exhaustive; they're instead designed to give a fallback font of ideas in case the GM can't come up with even more exciting ways of tying the setting to the action on the fly.

Aftermath

Finally, make sure you don't make the scene disappear simply because the PCs are outside of combat rounds. They'll still need to step over broken glass, look for hiding clerks, and so on. Giving the players a chance to interact with a scene after the "exciting" bits will point out what they did wrong ("Man; all this water caused a *lot* of damage . . .") and reinforce what they did right ("The five innocent bystanders here are all grateful that none of them got hurt, and several are thanking you profusely. The little boy catches a hamster and is petting it affectionately; he wants to name it after you . . .") You probably don't want to overdo the post-scene interplay, but even a few minutes helps reinforce that the setting is an actual place with a life before and after the excitement, rather than simply a cardboard backdrop waiting for folks to fight in front of.

Remember that not every scene needs to have an exciting setting; sometimes a bar is just a bar. And remember that the focus should still be the players; don't get so caught up in the clever use of scenery that you overshadow them and their fun. But for those scenes that *will* be interesting, a little bit of work both before and during the game can really make the setting come alive.

* * *

You may have noticed: Kenneth Hite isn't here this week.

But:

Hite will be back . . .

In *Thunderball!*

Er, no; maybe not. But he will be back.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Werewolf: The Dark Ages** p. 89.*

(Five stars and a cookie) "Over 400 pages and 100 illustrations. With more than 50 character classes and 1,000 spells, mutations, psionics, and special abilities. Includes instructions for engineering your own powers. Describes in complete detail the Worldship . . . and the more than 300 characters and monsters than inhabit her."

Designer's Notes: Transhuman Space: Fifth Wave

by Jon F. Zeigler

One of my avocations is that of futurist -- in fact, until recently I was a card-carrying member of the [World Future Society](#), which claims such luminaries as Arthur C. Clarke, John Naisbitt, and Alvin and Heidi Toffler among its membership. Professional futurists make a business out of predicting future economic and social trends. While I'm not professional, I did try to apply some futurist techniques to the design of Fifth Wave, and by extension to the design of Transhuman Space as a whole.

Present at the Creation

In January 2000 I was working on completing *GURPS Traveller: Rim of Fire*. I was also working on a futuristic hard-SF setting of my own. The "Prometheus Unbound" setting included aliens and faster-than-light travel, but otherwise it would have incorporated many of the conventions of post-cyberpunk, transhumanist science fiction. The "current date" for Prometheus Unbound was going to be about 2150.

Prometheus Unbound never got anywhere (although I may go back to it someday). On March 1, 2000, David Pulver dropped me a note describing *Transhuman Space* in very broad terms, and asking if I was interested in contributing. Naturally, I jumped at the chance to work with David on such an ambitious project -- not least because the resemblance to the Prometheus Unbound setting was very strong and I realized much of my work would be immediately applicable. While I worked on the *Rim of Fire* playtest and final draft, David and I discussed which book in the proposed series I would work on. At the time, the line plan included two books with working titles of "Earth Plus" and "Earth Minus," which would cover the prosperous and poor sections of Earth-bound civilization respectively. I chose the "Earth Plus" concept to work on, suggesting the title *Fifth Wave* as a reference to the theories of Alvin Toffler. Although I would not turn in a proposal for the book until *Rim of Fire* was in print, I was involved in the development of *Transhuman Space* from that point on.

Building the Earth

March and April 2000 was the time when David, Sean Punch, Gene Seabolt, and I worked out much of the social and political background of the setting.

My main contribution was in developing the geopolitical situation that appears in the books. I wanted the world situation to be very complex, with no one nation able to dominate global affairs. This suggested a system of Great Powers which could exist in rough balance. China, the European Union, and the United States were obvious from the beginning. Since I wanted to make sure the setting was both cosmopolitan and surprising to the audience, I suggested making China the world's leading military power and the E.U. the world's leaders in technology, placing the U.S. in an unequivocal third place in world affairs.

At this point, I began building a model for world population and economic growth. I wanted to have a consistent notion of how many people were living in which nations, and how prosperous they were likely to be.

The first piece of this analysis required making projections for world population as of 2100. The best sources I found for this kind of information were the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) and the [United Nations Population Information Network](#). The UN website was particularly useful, as it included low, middle, and high-range projections for world population -- as well as for the population of specific nations and regions. I began by building a Quattro Pro spreadsheet and importing the name and population data for every region covered by the UN data. The data only extended as far as 2050 for individual regions, but it was easy to create a mathematical model which projected the rate of population growth for each region into the 2050-2100 period. The result ignored much of the demographic detail that real economists use, but it did give me a projected world population of about 11 billion in 2100, very close to the actual

UN "middle range" projection for that year. While the final population figures I decided to use are probably not accurate, they are certainly plausible.

Once I knew how many people lived in each country, I wanted to know how well they were living. This was a trickier exercise -- predicting population growth is much easier than predicting the details of economic cycles.

I decided to start with each nation or region's Gross Domestic Product for 1999, and then assign an average sustained rate of GDP growth for each. These growth rates would be assigned more or less arbitrarily, but as far as possible they would also be in line with historical rates of growth.

I also decided to use the expected growth in productivity implied by the *GURPS* rules for advances in Tech Level. I observed that the United States in 1999, which could be considered a "mature" TL7 economy, had a per-capita GDP of about \$30,000. After some discussions with David and Sean Punch, I decided to peg the overall growth in productivity per TL at about 250%. This implied that the leading nations in 2100, with mature TL9 economies, would have average per-capita GDP of about \$187,500. This boiled down to a sustained annual growth rate for the global economy of about 1.85%, well within reason given historical trends (and given the assumption that a number of radical new technologies are going to appear in the course of the century).

Data for the 1999 GDP of each country or region came from the [CIA World Factbook](#), a resource I recommend very highly. From that starting point I assigned sustained growth rates to each country, ranging from about 1.5% up to about 5% per year. The lower rates went to nations which were either unlikely to get their economic act together, or which were already wealthy in 1999 and so had "mature" economies. The higher rates went to developing countries which seemed most likely to remain stable and could benefit from emerging biotechnology. All of these assignments were somewhat arbitrary, driven either by my educated impression of local situations, or by the demands of dramatic convenience.

All of this went into my growing spreadsheet. The results helped me see what other Great Powers might exist in the world. India was something of a surprise, coming out at the top of the population list and near the top in GDP. Minimal tweaking gave me the results I wanted regarding China, Europe, and the United States -- China with the largest single GDP, Europe with the highest per-capita GDPs among its members, and the United States slightly behind the overall European GDP.

Inventing Ideologies

To extend the Great Power notion, I wanted at least two more Great Powers . . . but it wasn't obvious which nations should have this position.

For inspiration, I went back to the vignettes in *GURPS Bio-Tech*, which David had admitted were drawn from early concepts for the *Transhuman Space* setting. Some of the vignettes mentioned a "Transpacific Socialist Alliance" and a "Pacific War," which David confirmed were part of the *Transhuman Space* back story. David had also mentioned a political ideology called "nanosocialism," which had something to do with the TSA, but had not been thoroughly developed.

When in doubt, I like to reason from historical analogies. I had already noticed that 2100 fell at a point on the generational cycle similar to the early 1930s, suggesting a period of impending crisis. This in turn suggested a correspondence between the TSA and the Soviet Union, an empire based on unique ideology. Soon I decided that nanosocialism would be an explicit analog of Marxism. Naturally the details had to be different, but I realized that nanosocialism could exist as the same kind of revolutionary ideology. Marx had developed his ideology as a critique of 19th Century industrial capitalism, especially its adversarial relationship between Capital and Labor. I needed to invent nanosocialism as a critique of early 21st Century capitalism -- but what kind of critique?

At the time, I was reading articles in the news about genetically engineered seeds produced by Monsanto Corporation. Monsanto had designed the seeds for crop plants that would be naturally resistant to the company's Roundup defoliant. Monsanto had patented the genetic sequences in its seeds, regarded them as similar to software, and was willing to use

patent-infringement lawsuits against farmers who obtained the seeds without paying for them. The company had also engineered some seeds to produce sterile crop plants -- thus requiring farmers to buy new seeds from Monsanto every year.

I was also reading articles about the availability of AIDS treatments. The parts of the world most devastated by AIDS are also among the poorest countries, especially in Africa and Southeast Asia. The drugs used in the most effective treatments for AIDS are quite expensive, and are patented by companies who (at the time) were resisting the production of cheaper "generic" versions. This struck me as another example of the same conflict between individuals and large patent-holding corporations, with the added complication that the patents on AIDS drugs could be held responsible for tremendous suffering in some of the world's poorest nations.

Meanwhile, in my "day job" I'm a computer professional. I was closely following the legal action that was already proceeding against Microsoft Corporation, for its alleged violations of anti-trust law and anti-competitive practices. I was already familiar with Microsoft's practice of concealing the "source code" for its products, and guarding those products with a dense hedge of licensing agreements and aggressive copy-protection.

Suddenly, considering all these items together, I had my critique. According to Marxist ideology, Capital held onto its privileged position because it owned "the means of production," the heavy machinery and manufacturing plants that made industrial civilization possible. In the coming information age, Capital would try to hold onto its privileged position by maintaining ownership of the new means of production: ideas.

I postulated a world in which large corporations used every political and technological method possible to keep ideas from being copied at will. Source code for software, "content" for the Internet, genetic sequences, nanotechnological designs, all would be strictly protected. Laws would come down heavily on those who used such information without paying the owner of the patents or copyrights. Against this trend, the natural means of rebellion would involve data piracy, the breaking of copy-protection technology, gene-hacking, and reverse engineering. Revolutionaries would try to distribute the benefits of new technology freely to the world's people, without regard for the profits of large patent-owning corporations.

I decided that "infosocialism" would be about the seizure of intellectual property, by revolutionaries or by the state. In a mature infosocialist society, the government would seize such information, award royalty payments to its creators, and then distribute it on whatever basis seemed most useful. Naturally, infosocialist nations would be at odds with traditionally capitalist states and large corporations worldwide -- which would allow for lots of conflict in the setting. I submitted the results for consideration by the others. David and Sean Punch were immediately enthusiastic about the idea, and it quickly became an integral part of the *Transhuman Space* setting.

To be honest, the invention of infosocialism is the element of *Transhuman Space* in which I take the most pride, as a futurist and as a writer.

Since April 2000, we have seen the increasing application of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act to attack both "hackers" and legitimate computer security researchers. We've seen extended legislation proposed in both the United States and Europe, which may in the future require aggressive copy-protection technology in every digital device and every piece of Internet content. We've seen the destruction of the file-sharing service Napster through litigation. We've seen Microsoft Corporation mount an assertive public-relations campaign against alternative products which incorporate "open source" programming methods. We've also seen nations in the developing world turn to that same "open source" code for their own internal development. The modern world does seem to be heading quite rapidly in the direction that would lead to the development of an infosocialist critique.

Meanwhile, the *Transhuman Space* fan community has come to include sympathizers for the TSA and nanosocialist ideology, as well as for the conventional capitalist system that drives most of the world of 2100. The fact that players have actually been driven to understand and take sides in this fictional conflict shows that we've managed something very special: relevant social commentary that actually adds value to the game.

Final Assembly

In any case, with the identity and ideology of the Transpacific Socialist Alliance established, we needed to decide what nations were going to be its members. At first, we were thinking in terms of an alliance led by Taiwan and Australia -- Taiwan because several of the vignettes in *GURPS Biotech* suggested a Chinese component to the TSA leadership, Australia because of some of the details in David Pulver's unpublished notes. Both of those ideas became less plausible to us as time passed. David decided that he wanted Taiwan to be unified with China early on, giving that nation the political unity it would need to pursue an aggressive space program. Australia also struck us as a very unlikely place for any kind of socialist ideology to take hold.

Unfortunately, taking Taiwan out of the TSA raised other difficulties. Since we had already established that the People's Republic of China was the major combatant in the Pacific War, opposing the TSA, this made it hard to justify the TSA's ethnic-Chinese leadership. Eventually I suggested Southeast Asia as the TSA's heartland. Many of the nations of that region have substantial ethnic-Chinese minorities, allowing us to rescue the Chinese names for TSA leaders. Several of those nations are already old-style Communist states, and none of them have ever been overly fond of China itself. This suggested a Pacific War involving heavy fighting in Southeast Asia.

To get the "Transpacific" part of the TSA, I suggested adding some of the Andean nations of South America -- Bolivia, Columbia, and Peru. It was not hard to justify the presence of these nations in the infosocialist bloc, especially given the "Andes War" which David had also mentioned in *GURPS Bio-Tech* vignettes. The Andes War also fit into another detail I had suggested for the setting: the U.S. involvement in Ecuador, following the construction of a major spaceport near Quito. (This last detail was actually a tribute to the late Poul Anderson, who used a similar idea in several of his novels.)

Eventually, we arrived at the list of TSA members that still stands in the finished setting. That left us with a few nations lacking any obvious allegiance. The Pacific Rim Alliance made sense as a counterweight to both China and the TSA, and had the useful effect of giving us a three-way "cold war" in the western Pacific region. The Islamic Caliphate was probably the least plausible notion, but it had the virtue of giving the Arab world some back story that didn't involve a brute projection of current politics. The South African Coalition was the result of the most plausible way we could think of to get a "renaissance" in sub-Saharan Africa.

By the end of April 2000, the broad outlines were finished. Much of what's now Chapters 1-3 of *Fifth Wave* was written in the summer of 2000, and later edited as parts of it were subsumed into the *Transhuman Space* core book.

Viruses of the Mind

One idea which we agreed from the beginning to include in the setting was that of memetics. Memes are a common idea in transhumanist literature, and they appear in a great deal of recent science fiction. The *Transhuman Space* core book includes an extensive discussion of memes and memetics, including rules for the Memetics skill on p. TS137.

The following extended rules for Memetics should certainly not be considered official, but they are something that I would have included in *Fifth Wave*, had I developed them early enough for a playtest.

In general, if a memeticist is interacting directly with a given individual, he does not need to make Memetics skill rolls. The "edge" that Memetics gives in such situations is reflected in the bonus to other skills (see p. TS137). Rolls against Memetics are normally used in situations where the memeticist is analyzing the behavior of an individual or group at a distance, or if he is attempting to advise others.

Any task involving a roll against Memetics usually requires about 10 minutes. Very complex analyses may take much longer (especially those involving Memetic Design).

Consultation: A memeticist may roll against his skill to study an individual or group and then advise someone else on how best to approach the subject of his analysis. In effect, the memeticist can "loan" his Memetics bonus to someone else. The loan is only effective for a single task.

Meme Analysis: On a Memetics roll, a memeticist can examine any text (or visual presentation) and determine what memes are present in it, as well as the degree to which those memes were deliberately placed. If the memeticist succeeds by 4 or more, he will be able to gather some information about the "ancestry" of the memes -- what memes are related, to what degree the memes were deliberately designed, and so on.

Memetic Design: This powerful application of Memetics allows the memeticist to design specific memes for a target audience. The memeticist must already be very familiar with the profile and past behavior of the target group (previous rolls against Memetics, Psychology or Research are appropriate here). The skill roll is modified by the number of people in the target audience, by the time taken for construction of the memes, and by the complexity of the memes, according to the following tables:

Size of Target Audience Modifiers

Size	Modifier
Up to 100	-2
101-1,000	-4
1,001-10,000	-6
10,001-100,000	-8
Additional factor of 10-2 extra	

Time Taken Modifiers

Time Taken	Modifier
1 hour	+1
2 hours	+2
4 hours	+4
8 hours	+6
1 day	+8
2 days	+10
4 days	+11
1 week	+12
2 weeks	+13
1 months	+14
2 months	+15
3 months	+16
6 months	+17
1 year or more	+18

Complexity Modifiers

Complexity	Modifier
Simple ("Drink AgriCola," "Vote for Smith")	+0
Medium ("Support bioroid emancipation")	-4
Complex (Complete religion or philosophy, with details)	-12

After the memeticist takes the requisite amount of time, the GM should roll in secret against his Memetics skill. This roll only reflects the design of the requisite memes. The memeticist (or his partners) must still deliver them in the content of a verbal or visual presentation. This requires access to communication channels used by the target audience, and usually costs about \$0.05 per member (doubled for Medium memes, multiplied by 10 for Complex memes). At the GM's discretion, he may require rolls against Photography, Video Production, Writing, or similar skills. If the target

audience is multilingual, the memeticist or his partners must construct material in all of the languages involved -- while real-time translation is possible, it sometimes misses nuances. This adds nothing to the final cost, but requires that the memeticist or his partners be fluent in all the target languages.

Once the memes are delivered, the target audience will absorb them and either accept or reject them. Naturally, many members of the audience will simply ignore the memes or reject them out of hand. For a typical meme which doesn't go against "conventional wisdom," about 1% of the audience will accept the meme for every point of success in the Memetics roll. Memes which are radically unusual or which encourage self-destructive behavior may have acceptance rates much lower than this. Any member of the target audience who accepts the memes will shift his behavior in accordance with the memes, acting as if the ideas were his own. The memeticist will not get to choose which members of the target audience accept his memes -- this is a matter of random chance. Note that audience members who do not accept the memes may still notice them, especially if they have Memetics skill of their own.

Successful memes often spread beyond their target audience. If a memeticist gets a critical success on his Memetics roll, the GM may assume that people outside the target audience have begun to accept and pass on the meme. Alternatively, on a critical success the memeticist can deliver his memes for only a fraction of the money, starting a "fad" that is mostly financed by the memes' earliest adherents.

On a critical failure, the memes will have an undesired effect. Perhaps some portion of the audience will accept them, but they will encourage behavior contrary to the designer's goals. Or perhaps the unaffected portion of the audience will notice the memes and begin acting against them. If the memes were delivered across the web, a critical failure may even indicate the formation of a Free Meme (p. FW32).

Memetic design is an accepted part of Fifth Wave civilization, and has its roots in the "advertising industry" of the 20th century. Some democratic states regulate only the most dangerous memes, those which directly promote violence or the overthrow of the state. Many nations are far more restrictive, and define the design or release of forbidden memes as a "memetic crime."

Example #1: Lim Chaing Lai (p. FW107) is designing memes to incorporate into a speech that one of his lieutenants is to give to an audience of 10,000 people. He has Memetics-16. The Size of Target Audience modifier is -6. Mr. Lim has a whole week to prepare the memes, so his Time Taken modifier is +12. The ideas he wants to convey are quite complex, and will set off elaborate chains of behavior if they are accepted, so the Complexity modifier is -12. Mr. Lim's total modifier is -6, and the cost of preparing the presentation is about \$5,000. He rolls a 7 against his Memetics skill, succeeding by 3. About 3% of the target audience (or 300 people) will accept the memes and change their behavior as a result.

Example #2: Alisa binti Kasan (p. TS105) wants to engineer a "suicide cult" as a combination prank and protest. She has Memetics-18 and (through her extremely wealthy family) access to a great deal of money. She targets the population of several U.S. states (about 50 million people), for a Size of Target Audience modifier of -14. She takes an entire year to research and design the memes for the Blood of the Lamb cult (Time Taken modifier of +18). The memes themselves are Medium, since they involve much less detail than a fully-developed religion (-4). Her total modifier is +0, and the cost of delivering the memes is about \$5 million. At the end of the year of work, she rolls a 12, succeeding by 6. For an ordinary meme, this would mean that about 6% of the target audience were "converted" (or about 3 million people). The GM rules, however, that the Blood of the Lamb memes are both unusual and encouraging of self-destructive behavior, so he reduces the acceptance rate to about 1 in 1,000. About 3,000 people accept the memes to the extent of joining the cult and eventually committing suicide. Alisa soon goes into hiding as a wanted criminal.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Pyramid Pick

Hero System Fifth Edition RPG

Written and Designed by Steven S. Long

Additional Contributions by Steve Peterson, Bruce Harlick, Ray Greer, the Magnificent Seven, John Kim

Layout and Graphic Design by Andy Mathews

374 pages; \$39.95

According to my battered, tape-covered, well thumbed *Champions!* hardcover, the *Fourth Edition* of the *Hero System* came out in 1989. Now, thirteen years is a long time for a new edition, but for its fans it's probably more than worth the wait.

The bulk of the *Hero System* book is its character creation system, perhaps one of the most robust ever . . . if you aren't afraid of math. Originally designed as a superhero game, the core of the *Hero System* is based around one concept: It's impossible to cover every possible superpower, skill, or ability separately while guaranteeing it does what the player wants. For example, consider a fireblast power: Suppose one player wants to be able to throw balls of fire that set enemies on fire in an area effect, doing damage each turn to the enemy as they're set on fire. Another player wants that fireblast to do some damage, but be more effective than normal since it bypasses armor (since the fire ignores armor). Still another player merely wants the power to be a special effect, and simply deal a bunch of damage all at once. In a game which tries to define a Fireblast power with a set ability, at least one (and possibly both . . . or all!) of the folks above will be disappointed, since the power doesn't do exactly what they want. And what if the player chooses the Fireblast power when what he *really* wants is a Magma Blast, which (in his mind) has some additional -- or different -- effects?

The *Hero System*, then, fundamentally breaks from the concept of defining abilities in terms of what they *are*, and changes that to what abilities *do*. In other words, if you want "Fireblast" to mean a fireball that does some damage in an area effect while continuing to deal damage after the initial attack -- with a special effect that the damage is fire-based, and sets objects on fire -- then you can break it down into the individual parts:

Fireblast: Energy Blast 2d6, Area of Effect (Radius), Continuous, Sticky, Uncontrolled: 40 points.

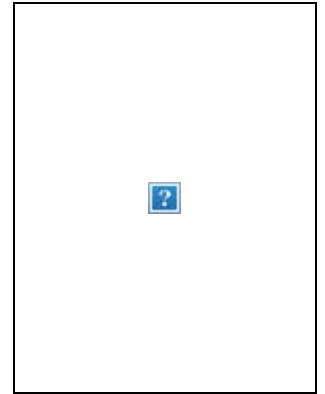
Now, once you are exposed to the Hero philosophy, you'll probably have (or develop) one of two positions:

"Wow! That's cool! I can detail precisely the power I want!"

or

"Wow! That's a lot of math! And looking at lists of powers presented as chopped up components makes my head hurt!"

If you think you're going to be in the latter camp -- with little or no hope of change



Heroic vs. Superheroic

One of the fundamental questions for those who play the Hero System is whether they will be playing a Heroic game or a Superheroic game. The fundamental difference? In a Superheroic game you need to pay points for gear; in a Heroic game you don't. The reason is simple. In the comics it's generally *very* uncommon for heroes to hold onto and use gear they find, and equally

-- than almost certainly the *Hero System* will not be for you.

If, on the other hand, you're intrigued, then keep on reading.

Okay; the *Hero System Fifth Edition* opens with an introduction where a brief overview of the game is presented. Unlike the *Fourth Edition*, it pretty much assumes that you know how to roleplay . . . although it does *not* assume you know anything about the *Hero System*. The introduction ends with an extensive Glossary of the important terms and concepts in the game.

Chapter 1, ranging from pages 11 through 224 (!), gives all the aspects of character creation. Character Creation in the *Hero System* is point-based; there is nothing random about it. The point levels determine how powerful (obviously) characters are going to be, from Standard Normals (0 points) to Standard Heroes (75 points) to Standard Superheroes (200 points) up to Cosmically Powered Superheroes (500+ points).

What other games call Attributes, the Hero System calls Characteristics. There are eight Primary Characteristics (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution [how healthy a character is], Body [how much damage a character can take before dying], Intelligence, Ego [mental strength and force of will], Presence [forcefulness of personality, charisma, etc.], and Comeliness. There are also five Figured Characteristics, which start out as averaged values of the Primary Characteristics: Physical Defense, Energy Defense, Speed, Recovery [how fast someone recovers from damage], Endurance [how much energy someone has to act, exert, or power his abilities], and Stun [how much damage the character can take before passing out].

Skills are detailed next; the average skill generally has a roll of 11 or greater on 3d6. There are 67 skills listed, ranging from Acrobatics to Bureaucratics to Deduction to Lipreading to Tactics to Ventriloquism to Weaponsmith. In general, almost any skill someone could think of is covered here, although the skills are possibly overly broad for those familiar with other heavily skill-based games (like *GURPS*). Science Skill, for example, broadly covers *all* sciences, and requires the players and GM to pick the specific science being represented by the Skill (Accounting, Mathematics, Organic Chemistry, and so on). In general the 28-page Skill system should work fine for a Superheroic or Heroic game, but could well fall somewhat short in a realistic or heavy real-world game.

The next section deals with Perquisites (aka Perks), which are the neat goodies and background resources a character could have, like Favors, Followers, and Money. Only six pages, this section probably requires the most player creativity, since few examples or concrete abilities are offered. Do you want access to a wizard's library? A mentor ally to guide you when you're in trouble? A sidekick? A hidden base? You can create all these things with the Perk system . . . but you'll need to think of them on your own. Unlike the Storyteller system from White Wolf, which places much importance on Backgrounds and other intangible abilities and ties to the world, the *Hero System* seems to place more importance on characters' innate abilities.

Next is the six-page Talent section, which covers the murky ground between "skill" and "superpower." Abilities like Eidetic Memory, Lightning Calculator, and Speed Reading are covered here. Although there are good possibilities here to augment "normal" humans with abilities that are above the human norm, this list is by no means exhaustive; players and GMs will need to be creative to come up with abilities that are still possibly realistic, yet may be technically Powers under the rules. (Many humans arguably have Acute Senses of some sort, for example, but these are listed as Powers; they simply need to be purchased at a very low level.)

Next is the 89-page Powers section. This is *incredibly* exhaustive, and it is arguably the most comprehensive power

uncommon for heroes to buy equipment they need. If it's important to be able to monitor police transmissions, superheroes will generally turn to their ally Radio-Hearing Man, rather than go out and buy a police scanner.

Of course, it's permitted in the rules for a character to pick up Dr. Diab's weapon and use it against him as a one-time event. But if the hero wants to tuck the weapon into his cape and continue using it, he'll need to pay points.

In a heroic game, on the other hand, heroes can keep and use whatever gear they find. Thus they can buy guns and armor, keep Dr. Diab's weapon (or the Sword of Shredding, or Foba Bett's Spaceship, or . . .), and so on.

Whichever choice is made will greatly affect the flavor and influence of the game.

selection ever developed: Aid, Drain, Entangle, Extra-Dimensional Movement, Flight, Invisibility, Luck, Power Defense, Shrinking, Telepathy, and so on. Although it's likely there are some abilities that can't be simulated somehow (especially through the use of Advantages and Limitations), it's equally likely that these are very few and far between. There are 65 Powers listed, but this is misleading; some Powers, like Enhanced Senses, have pages of options, suboptions, and possibilities. In addition, each Power is given *ample* examples, ideas, and options for use. A read through this section should give even the most jaded Super-player an idea or five for some neat new ability.

Next is the 22-page Power Advantages section. These provide additional effects to powers, like Armor Piercing, Cumulative (where the ability adds to itself each turn), Does Knockback, Usable On Others, and so on. After that is the 23-page Power Limitations, like Always On, Focus (the power is channeled through an object that can be stolen, lost, or broken), Only In Heroic Identity, Visible (which lets Powers that are normally invisible be seen), and so on. Advantages increase the cost of a Power, while Limitations reduce the cost. Using them in conjunction with Powers should enable you to do whatever you'd like; want an Invisibility Flight Belt that you can share with others, which only works in sunlight? Not a problem!

Next is the seven-page Power Framework section, which allows things like Variable Power Pools (you can do *anything*, within a limited number of Character Points), Multipowers (you have several powers that draw from the same energy; if you want a character who can't fly as fast when he's using an Energy Blast, for example), and Elemental Controls (which let you build, say, all your fire-based abilities under one umbrella). A useful tool for those with good character concepts, this section is also prone to insane abuse if the GM isn't careful and the players are evil.

Next is the 11-page Character Disadvantage section, covering things like Accidental Change, Dependence (you need something to survive), Hunted, and Vulnerability ("*Kryptonite!*")

Finally are a couple pages of example normal people, from a Small Child to a Competent Normal.

The trick to remember with the **Hero System**, again, is that practically anything you can think of can be created through mixing and matching Powers, Skills, Advantages, Limitations, and Disadvantages. An incredible Forensics skill that can only be used three times a day? Vulnerability to sunlight when you're in airless space? An entangling power that ensnares everyone in a radius around you (except for a hole in the center), forcing non-virgins to tell the truth? Not a problem!

The 64-page Chapter 2 (whew!) details Combat & Adventuring. It details movement, combat, damage (including optional effects like bleeding, knockback, and impairment), recovery (how to get better), and so on.

The primary premise of Combat (and other Turn-based encounters) is based on the 12-second Turn, which consists of 12 Segments. The Segments a character acts during is based on the Speed Characteristic, which ranges from 1 to 12 (normally); thus a character with Speed 3 will act on Segments 4, 8, and 12, while the Speed 7 character will act on Segments 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12.

As a result of this system -- and the fact that most characters can take (and dish out!) a great deal of damage -- combat tends to be pretty slow . . . especially for large encounters. Within one "Turn" dozens of actions can take place, each with their own rolls, targets, effects, and results. There is a *lot* to resolve in a combat, and those who are used to more fluid, fast systems may well balk at the amount of math, dice-rolling, and bookkeeping required here. An Energy Blast, for example, may well deal 10d6 (or more!) damage if it hits, which is a lot of rolling and counting. The Combat system is, again, generally geared towards a cinematic game. As an example, a player who makes a "realistic" character with a human-level Speed of 2 or 3 will find themselves overshadowed in most Turns by superheroes with Speeds of 5 or 6, who will do two to three times as much in a Turn! Even if the Speed 6 Superhero isn't as effective as the Speed 3 Human, the *player* will still get the GM's attention twice as much, which might be a problem.

Regardless, the combat system works well for what it's trying to recreate: the cinematic (and superheroic!) give-and-take of battle, with everyone trying to maneuver themselves into position, use abilities that damage their foes, have dramatic recoveries, and exercise a myriad of tactical options. It is, unfortunately, difficult to "speed up" the system without making it more lethal, and combats with large numbers of combatants can go on a while.

The 20-page Chapter 3 covers "environmental" rules, which are rules that effect the environment (or vice versa): falling, chemicals, fire, and breaking or hiding things. Again, almost every common possibility is covered here.

Chapter 4, Equipment, deals with weapons, gear, bases and vehicles, and so on in its 26 pages. Like characters, most gear is given Characteristics and "Powers", as appropriate. Thus a sportscar might have a Strength of 25 (it can carry a lot of stuff), a Body of 13 (it can take damage), a Dexterity of 20 (very maneuverable!), and a Speed of 4 (and fast!). A rifle might do 2d6-1 damage, have 10 shots, and require a Strength of 15 to wield. The rules here are very solid, but again it may be difficult to look at a piece of gear as something "cool" instead of a collection of stats.

Chapter 5 is the Gamemastering section, and covers basic (and advanced) techniques for the GM to keep it all together in its 11 pages. There are many sections, including tips on maintaining mood and atmosphere, how to be part of the character creation process, and one called "Deadly Don'ts."

Chapter 6, Changing the System, gives a 10-page peek "behind the curtain" at the *Hero System*. For those who want to add to, change, or otherwise tweak the system, this is invaluable; many other games would do well to include such a section. Finally, Chapter 7 is the three-page Conclusion, giving information on the origins of the *Hero System* and some advice for where to go next for more *Hero* resources.

The book ends with an incredibly thorough 11-page index and a two-page character sheet.

In terms of layout, the book is a sturdy (if huge) hardcover. The art is, for the most part, sparse and uninspiring (to put it generously), with some notable exceptions. Many pieces seem to have been pulled from the 4th Edition book (and they *look* more than a decade old), while many of the newer pieces don't look much better. (There are exceptions; the martial artist on page 350, for example, is quite interesting.) Fortunately it's not an actively *ugly* book, but it's also not very exciting.

The layout, on the other hand, is quite good; it's in an attractive two-column format, with sidebars on each outside edge that give plenty of "little bits": examples, sample powers, characterizations of abilities, and so on. There are lots of tables, but they all *look* good, with a nice shading effect. Since it's a book you'll spend a lot of time poring over, it's nice to know that it's quite well-organized, and generally pleasing to the eye.

In all, not everyone will like or appreciate the *Hero System*. But those who *do* understand and appreciate it -- and those who aren't scared off by math, options, or combat speed -- may well find it to be one of their favorites. The Fifth Edition, although more evolutionary than revolutionary, is still a significant compilation of tweaks and modifications to a system that is -- by many standards -- a classic. For its fans, both old and new, this volume is a more-than-worthy update escorting it into the new millennium.

--Steven Marsh

Anjali Phoenix

by **Ralph Melton**

Anjali Phoenix is a cybernetically enhanced woman with buggy cyberware. She has accumulated so many enhancements that she has trouble functioning in normal society, and yet she keeps acquiring more in hopes of getting the perfect combination.

Appearance

Physically she shows her Indian blood, with dark skin, long brown hair, and sharp angular features. When she thinks to dress carefully, she wears retro-gothic outfits from the 1990s, but her clothes are usually scruffy from neglect. She has an interface jack at her right temple. Underneath her hair, her scalp is tattooed with the message NO MRI-METALLIC IMPLANTS.

In conversation, she is usually very unfocused and distractible, bouncing about from topic to topic without warning, in response to things most people don't notice. When she uses her focus, she is almost entirely oblivious to external distractions and hardly participates in conversation at all.

History

Anjali was born with the name Anjali Dal. Her mother left when she was three, and she grew up in the care of her father, who was a fence for cyberware and a back-alley bionics splicer. Her father installed her first cyberware for her eleventh birthday: a skull-implanted wide-band radio receiver.

One evening when she was 12, Anjali was idly skimming channels as she walked home when she overheard a discussion. A crime organization moving into the area had found Mr. Dal uncooperative, and was planning to rub him out as an example to the community. She hid blocks away and listened in horror to the broadcast of the goons setting fire to the building and her father running out into a hail of gunfire. This experience of avoiding death because of her radio scanner formed the basis of her obsession with cybernetic enhancement.

After her father's death, she was taken in by a corporate orphanage that reared children to be good corporate drones. Here she learned basic computer programming and electronic engineering. Unfortunately, when Anjali reached puberty, the hormonal changes in her body interfered with her control of her radio. Instead of selecting which channel she was listening to, her radio now played her all channels, all the time.

Even with the problems posed by her radio, she retained a fascination with cyberware, and a conviction that her cyberware had saved her life.

In adulthood, she ended up working a variety of marginal jobs, mostly involving programming and netrunning. The distraction of her radio caused many of her jobs to end early, but her exceptional talents at programming got her new jobs quickly.

Meanwhile, she bought new cyberware whenever she could in a perpetual search for the perfect set of cyberware. However, she could rarely afford top-of-the-line, well-debugged equipment; instead, she usually got with grey-market gear, beta-test versions, and off-brand imitations. The bugs and unexpected interactions of the cyberware have had serious effects on her personality and behavior, but she keeps getting more in her quest to be the perfect system.

At the age of 26, she left the corp to work as an independent contractor, because short-term contracts were easier for her to handle than a long-term position. At the same time, she changed her name to Anjali Phoenix, to represent her recreating herself through her cybernetic enhancement.

Cyberware and Abilities

She has the following cyberware:

- Her original wide-scan radio, still playing on all channels. She has gotten better at ignoring irrelevant channels, but the radio still distracts her at times.
- She also favors other enhanced senses, particularly enhanced vision and hearing. This combination makes her even more distractible, because these sensory cues keep breaking her concentration.
- In order to compensate for her distractibility, she has had a computer implanted that provides her with an artificial eidetic memory. This allows her to cover for getting distracted in conversation, for example, by replaying the parts of the conversation that she had neglected. However, her eidetic memory has approximately the limitations of a very good DVD player. It has no index, so she has to search with fast-forward and rewind to find a particular memory. Once she finds a memory of an event, reviewing it requires as much time as the event originally took, though she can skim an event several times faster, or proceed more slowly for careful detail. And her memory only records sound, vision, and her radio, not any other senses. Her memory does record sounds when she is sleeping, although she is unlikely to know that there is anything of interest for her to go back and listen to.
- Her artificial memory helps her compensate for her distractibility somewhat, but it does not help her focus on long tasks like computer programming. For those purposes, she has had installed an artificial gland that, when triggered, releases a hormonal cocktail that gives her an intense focus and concentration. During this focus, she concentrates on one thing to the exclusion of all else, often forgetting to eat and sleep. She has installed a reminder program in her computer implant, but her concentration is deep enough that she often ignores the reminders.
- After a few scary encounters, she has had installed artificial combat reflexes and martial arts training. But her combat reflexes are oversensitive. Sometimes she finds herself attacking someone or running away for no explainable reason. (Perhaps it's a particular behavior that's normally innocuous which registers as aggressive to her artificial reflexes.)
- She has a neural interface to the net that is a heavily customized variant of an obscure system. This means that she is not vulnerable to most of the attacks more standard systems are vulnerable to, but it also means that she can't process much of the information on the net. (Imagine using Mosaic when the rest of the world is using MS Internet Explorer.)
- She also has an unexplained chip in her skull with no power supply and no connections to anything else. It ought to have no effect, but when a curious surgeon removed it, Anjali convulsed in epileptic fits. The surgeon returned it and labeled it "Magic."

This represents her cyberware at one point in her life. Later in her career, she is likely to acquire more gear, and perhaps overcome some of the quirks of her systems. Earlier in her career, she would (obviously) have less hardware. And at any time, she is likely to experiment temporarily with enhancements that turn out to have side effects that are too serious for her to keep them.

She has a blind spot about the idea of removing any of the cyberware she has had for a long time. She might be persuaded that she has so much cyberware that it's causing her problems-but for any particular piece of cyberware, she knows why she really needs it and is averse to getting rid of it.

By now, she has enough cyberware and enough spaghetti code linking her systems that the only splicers who would dare to work on her are either brilliant or unethical. She can rarely afford the services of the brilliant ones, so she goes to back-alley hacks for her modifications, or she does them herself. She has the strength of will and the programming finesse to do many of her own mods, but her programming -- while brilliant and novel -- is so undisciplined that it makes it even harder for anyone else to understand it and modify it.

Using Anjali in a Game

Anjali is not well suited to be the primary villain or patron of an adventure; she really needs someone to take care of her, remind her to eat and sleep, and so forth. Instead, she works best as a henchman of either a villain or a PC. In that role, she can provide excellent skills in her specialties, but she requires a lot of care and attention; she can also be very frustrating to get along with. And if anyone should pursue romance with her, he'll be in for a bumpy ride.

Combat with her can be uncertain; her artificial combat skills can compensate for her distractibility. Even so, she is unlikely to be much of a match for combat-oriented characters. It is more interesting to put her in social situations where her social dysfunctions can play themselves out.

Anjali's willingness to experiment with poorly-tested cyberware can make her suitable for scenarios where it's necessary for someone to volunteer for modifications that turn out to be harmful.

Adventure Seeds

- **Root Password to the Soul:** In some of the back-alley cybernetic work she's had done, a malicious hacker has left himself an override for some of her cyberware. Now, he's using his access to try to turn her into a programmed minion by reprogramming her cyberware and altering her memories. When the heroes notice her changing behavior, they'll have to counterhack her psyche-and decide what code belongs here and what what does not. And how will the hacker's changes interact with Anjali's own modifications? (Alternately, the adventurers can be the ones trying to surreptitiously hack into her consciousness.)
- **The Human Brain Is a Kludge:** In her mass of self-hacking, Anjali has accidentally devised an algorithm that decrypts certain codes far more quickly than any computer scientist has managed. This would be worth quite a lot to several megacorporations, if the algorithm could be distilled from the rest of the spaghetti code of her cyberware. PCs can be friends of Anjali, or agents of one of the groups seeking to acquire Anjali's secret knowledge by money and by force. This adventure could climax with one of the characters frantically unraveling code while other characters fend off an assault by another team.

Variations on a Theme

The key concept behind Anjali is the idea of willful transformation of the self that has unintended consequences. Cybernetic enhancement provides a very direct expression of that self-transformation, but the idea can be expressed in other ways. For example, consider a character with so many magical tattoos that they end up overlapping and interfering with each other, or a Voodoo "horse" who is ridden by more than one loa. This concept might also form the fundamental paradox of a style of magick for *Unknown Armies*.

Appendix Z: The Emergency Generator

by Brian Rogers

As a kid I wondered about the blueprints for heroic HQs -- there was always an "Emergency Generator." Didn't they have enough emergency in their lives? Why generate more? When I started gaming I realized that it existed for those sessions without a plot! Sitting around the base bored? Flick on the Emergency Generator and Presto! Instant heroic opportunity!

Below are blueprints for your very own Emergency Generator, good for Supers, Pulp, or Action Heroes. One roll tells you the emergency, the next reveals the dastardly force responsible. Sometimes it will produce apparently nonsensical emergencies -- Unscrupulous Journalists responsible for Freak Weather? Organized Crime behind an Otherworldly Disaster? -- that can nonetheless spark inspiration. Perhaps a scientist predicting the freak weather comes to the heroes after the media makes him a laughing stock, or the Journalist is risking his crew's lives in the weather, forcing the heroes into unnecessary danger. Maybe the Tong stole Dr. Wittlesbach's dimensional interface generator, or the Don has made a literal deal with the Devil? After all, if *General Hospital* can be menaced by a blizzard-generating madman, anything can happen in your action game!

Emergency Type

Roll Emergency

- 1 **Artifact:** An object or invention of potentially vast power or value comes to light. Who built it? Why? *GM Note:* It may just be a MacGuffin, and not actually *do* anything.
- 2 **Assassin:** Someone has hired an assassin. Who's the target? (1 -- Politician, 2 -- Journalist, 3 -- Scientist, 4 -- Cop, 5 -- Celebrity, 6 -- Dignitary) Who's the killer? Who started this? Why?
- 3 **Captured:** The heroes have been captured and need to turn the tables and escape. How did they get caught, and by whom? Where *are* they?
- 4 **Contagion:** A disease is loose, or someone is threatening to release one. Can the heroes discover who's at risk, prevent panic, and find the cure in time? What does the disease do?
- 5 **Dangerous Animals:** Every pulp hero needs to wrestle gorillas! Where did these animals come from, and how many are there? What makes them dangerous, and to whom?
- 6 **Earthquake:** . . . or its cousins, volcanic eruptions and unsafe buildings. Get the innocents out as more tremors loom. What's getting buried or uncovered?
- 7 **Exposed!:** Someone has discovered a hero's secret; for Supers this is usually a secret ID or weakness, but everyone has secrets. How do you stop the exposure or blackmail?
- 8 **"Everyday" Crimes:** there's been a rash of (1 -- Muggings, 2 -- Vandalism, 3 -- Robberies, 4 -- Assaults, 5 -- Kidnappings, 6 -- Shootouts/Bombings) lately. Who's behind them?
- 9 **Fire:** Actual or threatened, fire forces the heroes to action. Is it accidental, arson, or negligence? How many lives are at risk? What's being burned so the heroes don't find it?
- 10 **Framed!:** One or more of the heroes are framed. They must prove their innocence and catch the real crook (who might not be who framed them) with the authorities on their tail.
- 11 **Freak Weather:** Harsh, unseasonal weather (blizzard, tornado, flooding rain, etc.) threatens the city. Is it natural or manufactured? Is it giving criminals cover?

- 12 **Harassed:** Someone has started bedeviling the heroes at every turn. What do they hope to gain? It is a big test, a big mistake or an attempt to drive them off?
- 13 **Impersonated:** Someone has stolen a hero's good name. Who are these impostors? It is hero worship, a complex smear job, or something sinister?
- 14 **Murder:** Someone's been killed, and the killer's at large. This can be a complicated mystery, a hunt to stop a serial killer, or a chase to get the killer before he gets away.
- 15 **Otherworldly Crime:** The crime sure *looks* like it was done with magic, high tech, or other unusual means. How can the heroes bring an otherworldly crook to justice?
- 16 **Otherworldly Disaster:** Something has gone wrong in another dimension/time/realm, with high technology or in outer space, and the heroes are called in to help.
- 17 **Otherworldly Visitor:** An alien (time traveler/dimension hopper/lost realm native) turns up. Real or Hoax? Why is he here? Where is there? Who's going to profit from the situation?
- 18 **Target!:** Someone is trying to kill one of the party. Why? How are they going to take the hero out of the picture? Can they stay alive long enough to find out what's going on?
- 19 **Transported:** The heroes are suddenly elsewhere, usually a war zone or hostile planet. How they got there (Drugged and moved? Beamed?) depends on who's responsible, but they have to get home!
- 20 **War!:** Or at least a small scale battle. What are the sides -- gang war, or alien races battling over Earth -- and can the heroes stop it before it spirals out of control?

Dastardly Force Table

Roll Dastardly Force

- 1 **Unscrupulous Journalists:** They're moral-dilemma generators who slander the heroes one week and expect to be rescued from their folly the next . . . and they're willing to do anything for a ratings boost.
- 2 **Corrupt Officials:** Not everyone in authority is one the up and up. These people always want the heroes out of their secret business, and will go to great lengths to assure it stays secret.
- 3 **Street Gangs:** Maybe they're the junior Mafia, maybe they're good kids looking for a break, but whatever they are, they can sure cause trouble for the heroes.
- 4 **Organized Crime:** The Mobs are always great villains, since they can easily be behind anything. The question is *which* mob . . . and what's their angle?
- 5 **Mad Scientist:** They called him mad at the university, but he'll show them! He'll show them all! Hmmm . . . Robot army, crime ray, or earthquake generator?
- 6 **World Conqueror:** He has a master plan, a small army of mooks and scientists, and a base in the nearby volcano. Now if it wasn't for those pesky heroes . . .
- 7 **Otherworld Contact:** Aliens, chrononauts, or dimension hoppers, they're directly or indirectly responsible. How? Why? Can they be calmed or driven off?
- 8 **Man on the Street:** Who says it has to be someone "important?" Maybe he's unbalanced, maybe it was an accident, but this guy is the originator of the troubles, and has to be found.
- 9 **Super-Villain:** Got any good "hunted" disadvantages floating around? If your genre doesn't support actual super-villains, giving someone an ominous name and a skintight leather outfit works fine.
- 10 **Roll Twice Again:** Nothing spices up a game like overlapping opponents! Whatever's going on, more than one group is causing or complicating it.

Pyramid Review

The Judge Dredd Roleplaying Game

Published by [Mongoose Publishing](#)

Written by Matthew Sprange

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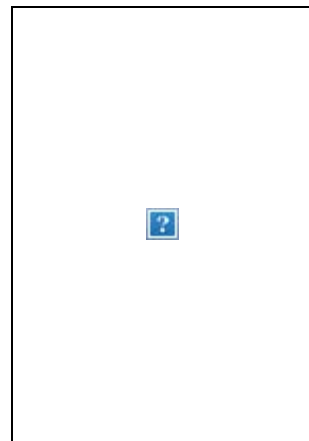
256-page hardback; \$39.95

The British Weekly comic *2000AD* has been going for twenty-five years now. Since 1977 there have been over twelve hundred issues (plus other comic spin-offs) and the comic has been the starting point for many of today's noted comic book writers and artists such as Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, and Simon Bisley. Some of the comic's characters have crossed over into other media, but none more so than Judge Dredd, the stone-faced, Dirty Harry-inspired lawman of Mega-City One. There have been newspaper strips, team-ups with Batman, miniature figures, T-shirts, computer games, a mediocre movie, decent audio adaptations of some of the classic stories, and -- of course -- games.

For British gamers, many of whom read *2000AD* each week, the announcement in the 1980s of an RPG based upon the character to be published by Games Workshop was received with no small anticipation. This was, after all, *the* big British license, and they had already released a Judge Dredd board game that was a lot of fun. This boded well for the RPG. The resulting game, published in 1985, certainly caught the flavor of the comic, but the game mechanics left something to be desired; in particular it was too easy to kill off player Judges, as the only armor they were given was on the head, one shoulder, knees, elbows, and boots. One shot to the stomach or chest and that was it for most Judges. The saving grace for *The Judge Dredd RPG* was the innovative nature of the scenarios, many of which were written by Marcus L. Rowland. Games Workshop followed the basic set with their adventures *Judgement Day* and *Slaughter Margin*, the supplement games *Block Mania* and its expansion *Mega-Mania*, as well as supporting it with articles and scenarios in both *White Dwarf* magazine and the *Judge Dredd Companion*. Of course, this being a Games Workshop release, it was supported with a range of now-collectible miniatures. Then, for whatever reason, the Games Workshop game was no more.

Now, over a decade later, the property returns to the hobby again as an RPG. A British publisher is releasing the game once again. Mongoose Publishing have released a wide range of *d20* supplements for *D&D3e*, exploring numerous races, magic, fantasy seafaring, and fantasy cities. With plenty of *d20* experience under their belt, it is no surprise that their *Judge Dredd RPG* would use that engine. This does mean that the *Players Handbook* will be necessary in order to run the game, which may be something of a disappointment to some . . . not just to those who have a severe dislike of the *d20* system, but to those without it and wanting to play *The Judge Dredd RPG*, who will need to pay \$29.95 for the *Players Handbook* and \$39.95 for this book.

The Judge Dredd RPG is Mongoose's first hardback and it is a solid affair, liberally illustrated with strips from both *2000AD* and from the character's newspaper appearances. All of these are in black and white, and generally come from the classic period of the comic. Indeed, there are no strips taken from more recent issues of *2000AD*, where they have been produced in color for many years now. Unfortunately, many -- if not nearly all -- of those strips have been poorly reproduced in the game. While not difficult to read, they are bitmapped, reducing the quality of the book. That said, there are a number of full color plates, some of which serve a useful purpose; these include the map of Earth and



illustrations of both the Judge's Lawgiver Mk. II pistol and the Manta Ray Tank. Others are just attractive eye candy, but they *do* show up how uninteresting the image Mongoose has selected for the cover is in comparison. Finally it must be said that the book is not entirely free of typographical errors.

The setting for the game is Mega-City One, a huge conurbation on the eastern seaboard of North America. In 2124 it is home to 400 million, crammed into living space for half that number. Only a few have employment for a few hours each week, while the rest are unemployed and thus have the time to pursue any number of weird hobbies and pastimes. These include sky surfing, competitive eating, make use of Boing (bouncing around inside transparent rubber balls), synchronized leaping off the side of buildings, scrawling (adding graffiti), and fashion crazes such as making themselves genuinely ugly through surgery! Of course, crime is rife and the city is policed by the Judges, lawmen with fifteen years training who are unforgiving in their pursuit and application of both justice and the law. They are judge, jury, and executioner . . . though it is rare that a sentence will be death. Normally sentences range from fines to terms in the iso-cubes, for crimes including your usual murder, robbery, and tax evasion . . . plus littering, begging, smoking in public, organ legging, Boinging in public, and participating in a war between the city's huge habitation blocks.

It should be made clear that although the setting for most of the *Judge Dredd* tales is the remnants of the USA, it has a slightly British feel to it. Later stories have expanded to include Brit-City, as well as other locations around the post-nuclear war setting. This British feel is evidenced both in the writing of the comic and in this book, and most obvious in its slight satirical edge.

The most obvious characters to play in *The Judge Dredd RPG* are, of course, the judges. Humans are the only race possible, as are either the Street Judge or the Psi-Judge character classes. Much as characters did in Pinnacle Games' *Weird War II: Blood on the Rhine*, judges of either type enter play at third level. This represents their fifteen years at the academy and makes them more than capable of dealing with your lowly first-level "perp."

Street Judges are tough, with d12 hit dice, all the racial bonuses of the human race found in the *Player's Handbook*, plus bonus feats at first, second, and then every other level after that! Thus a Street Judge begins the game with an impressive three feats. Psi-Judges have only a d8 as their hit dice, start with one less feat (they have the Psi-Talent feat for free), and have less skill points overall. As compensation they have psionics, which are derived from the charisma attribute -- a higher charisma provides a Psi-Judge with extra power points per day to manifest their abilities. Psionic abilities are organized by level in a fashion similar to spells in the *Player's Handbook*. Those listed here cover various types of telepathy, extra sensory perception, precognition, and psi based attacks. More advanced abilities like telekinesis and teleportation will probably be discussed in a future supplement, but they are rare among Psi-Judges.

A long list of new feats are given to fit the *Judge Dredd* setting, with only a few physically orientated feats allowed from the *Player's Handbook*. The new feats are divided into three types: general feats, including all those allowed from the *Player's Handbook* plus new ones such as Bike Wheelie or Luck of Grud; Judge only feats -- Menacing Presence, Spot Hidden Weapon, or Nark; and psi or meta-psi feats.

One thing that *The Judge Dredd RPG* from Games Workshop did not really allow was for player characters that were not judges. In the Mongoose game players can be part of the ordinary citizen class, who mostly turn to crime to improve themselves and their status. They start out at level one, only have d6 for their hit dice, yet gain a lot more skill points than either of the Judge classes. To represent the events and experience gained as ordinary citizens during the time in which a Judge is undergoing training, a player selects a Prior Life for their character. Each of the Prior Lives listed provides a mix of special abilities, feats, and possible disadvantages to represent their leisure time, or (more rarely) time spent in a job. They include Agitator, Batter (who like gliding on batwings), failed cadet, inventor, Jugger (truck) Driver, Neo-Luddite, Private Investigator, Rogue Psyker, and Wall Hopper or mutant who has got into the city from the irradiated Cursed Earth outside.

Characters can progress from their basic class to a range of prestige classes. For the judges these include several types of specialist judges: the Med-Judge, the Tek-Judge, the SJS Judge (Mega-City One's equivalent of internal affairs), and the Wally Squad (or undercover judge). Citizen characters have a wider array of prestige classes to choose from, including Assassin, Bat Burglar, the Citi-Def Officer, Nark (snitch to the judges), Superhero, or Supersurf Champion, who race the skies on hover boards.

Of course, the game engine in *The Judge Dredd RPG* is WotC's d20, now familiar to most gamers. The biggest changes in the mechanics for this game appear in the rules for combat, with the first question on everyone's lips being, "How does it handle Armor Class?" In fact, the Armor Class concept is not actually used and is instead replaced by an innate Defense Value. This is determined by adding a character's reflex save bonus, size, and possible miscellaneous modifiers to a base of ten. The main effect of armor is to actually reduce damage done -- a judge's bodysuit has a damage reduction of 6, electricity reduction of 4, with a standard pistol round inflicting 3d6 damage. Citizens can buy better armor on the black market, but it is invariably expensive and bulky. Even so, players need to learn the value of duck and cover, as firefights can be deadly. The rules cover spray fire, shots against fast moving targets, and making called shots against the vital spots upon the human body, as well as on vehicles and robots. Combat has also been speeded up by giving every character the equivalent of the "Shot on the Run" feat, allowing them to run, shoot, then run again up to the level of their movement allowance in a combat round.

New rules and mechanics cover the use of both robots and vehicles on the ground and in the air. Chases along the streets and meg-ways -- and in the skies above -- are very common in Mega-City One. Again, these rules are simple and fall in line with the personal combat rules. With access to a range of hi-tech weaponry and vehicles, Judges have a lot of firepower and back-up available, and GMs will need to be careful that players do not rely too heavily on either.

The bulk of this book is devoted to explaining the setting of Mega-City One to both player and GM alike. This includes a general description of the city and its inhabitants, before looking at them from the point of view of both judges and citizens. It concentrates more upon the former, as judges are really the main focus of the game, but there is more than enough information present to run a citizen-only campaign. The section on campaigns discusses both types and gives scenario ideas for either type as well as suggesting a number of possible variations.

What is missing are any of the stats for major characters from the comic: Judge Dredd, Psi-Judge Anderson, the notorious Angel Gang, any of the Dark Judges -- Death, Fire, Fear and Mortis -- the sky surfing champion Marlon "Chopper" Shakespeare, Don Uggie and his Ape Gang, and so on. While there are rules and guidelines for a GM to create and design NPC creeps of their own, with stats for many races included with this purpose in mind, a GM will not be able to use any of the classic characters in their game. . . . at least, not until the *Game Master's Screen* and *Mega-City One's Most Wanted* supplement is released. Yet without them *The Judge Dredd RPG* feels incomplete, more so when you consider that the stats for the titular character do not appear. In their defense, Mongoose's reasoning is understandable; it makes the screen and the supplement far more useful in the long run, rather than producing a screen with a one-shot scenario.

What lies outside the scope of the publisher, but is also a little disappointing, is the need for the *Player's Handbook* to run this game. The mechanics present in *The Judge Dredd RPG* add very little to the forty pages needed from the *Player's Handbook*. The resulting combination is a light, fast-paced game that is more than suited to the setting. It almost leaves one wishing that the game came packaged with the d20 version of *GURPS Lite*. If it had, it would have made up for the lack of NPC descriptions. In all likelihood, Mongoose Publishing's next license, based on the *Slainé* comic strip also from *2000AD*, will make more use of the d20 core books.

If you happen to be a fan of the *Judge Dredd* strip, then there is no real reason *not* to like this book, although in places its execution is not as perfect as it could be. Should that reason be a dislike of the d20 system, remember that this is very much a "d20 lite" game and very, very much a d20 game divorced from elves, dwarves, dragons, Orcs, magic and dungeons . . . in fact a game divorced from the majority of the *Player's Handbook*. For those looking not so worried about the nature of the game engine, *The Judge Dredd RPG* will provide plenty of darkly humorous gaming much in the same vein as the old *Paranoia RPG*.

After a long line of solid d20 supplements, *The Judge Dredd RPG* is a marked departure for Mongoose Publishing. Apart from a few relatively minor quibbles, this proves that both company and author are worthy of the challenge of their first license.

--Matthew Pook

GURPS Combat Tactics: The Basics

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

The *GURPS* Advanced Combat System can be very complicated. A big part of the complication is the number of choices available to each and every combatant. Yet experience has shown that most people fail to take advantage of the options the ACS makes available. The aim of this article, then, is to provide some basic tactics for making the most of those options offered in the ACS.

Most of this advice is aimed directly at people using the Advanced Combat System. People using the Basic combat system can use the same advice -- just ignore references to Step . . . the advice remains the same. This article does not cover Close Combat, cinematic rules, and the maneuvers from *GURPS Martial Arts* -- those topics would require their own article to cover adequately.

The tactics discussed presume a predominantly melee combat environment; once you add guns the combat climate changes. However, this advice applies equally well to any hand-to-hand combat from TL0 to TL16. You use the same Step and Attack with a Force Sword as you do with a Hand Axe.

GURPS Basic offers about ten significant maneuvers: Change Position, Aim, Step and Ready, Step and Attack, All-Out Attack, Step and Feint, Step and Concentrate, Step and Wait, All-Out Defense, and Move. *GURPS Compendium II* adds All-Out Charge.

Step and . . .

(p. B104)

First, a look at Step. A "Step" maneuver allows you to step one hex in any direction and end with any facing. Only Move, All Out Attack, and Wait restrict your facing when you move (see sidebar p. B103). This is important -- you can step backwards and turn 180 degrees and strike with no penalty. This gives you great flexibility when choosing a maneuver, but must be used wisely.

A few general rules with Step are: never step into a worse position than the one you left, and never take a step until you have to. The first rule is simple; do not, by taking a step, put yourself in a bad position. Be aware of the positions of all of the combatants -- All-Out Attack, long reach or ranged weapons, and Move maneuvers can bring an attack home quickly. Keep a watchful eye on your facing; three of the six hexes you are adjacent to are considered flank or rear hexes. Also keep aware of the positions of your comrades. Perhaps a Step may be helpful to you, but put a comrade into a bad situation. The reverse is also true; you and your comrades can maneuver as a team to force an opponent to expose a flank or a back hex to attack. And once in a great while, it can be useful to put yourself in a poor position, in order to put an opponent in an even worse predicament.

The second rule is also simple -- if you do not need to take the Step and . . . portion of your maneuver first, either to put yourself into or out of range, do not take it first. Having the Step reserved to follow up on a Retreating foe, or to step away and turn to face a second foe after finishing the first one, or to back up to keep an opponent at a distance are all very useful. Remember that you must step *on your own turn* -- you cannot Step during an opponent's turn except as part of a Wait maneuver -- see below. Do not be afraid to take your Step first when you need to, but there are tactical advantages to doing so after you see how the rest of your turn went.

Now, on to the maneuvers. They are addressed in the same order they appear in *GURPS Basic* to make this article useful as a side-by-side reference.

Of the maneuvers, Change Position (p. B103), Aim (pp. B103-104), and Step and Concentrate (p. B106) are fairly self-explanatory. Change Position is useful to get up after a fall or to take a kneeling or crouching stance, but you usually want to do your fighting standing up. Aim is useful but easily disrupted by attackers when you are in a melee.

Step and Concentrate is only really useful with supernatural powers that are beyond the scope of this article.

Ready

(p. B104)

Ready is pretty straightforward -- one second to ready a weapon, two seconds to put it away. One second per PD of a shield to take it out or put it away, one second to drop a shield.

If you are wielding a weapon with a ready time -- such as an Axe, Pick, or Halberd -- nothing says you cannot hold onto it unready. While you cannot parry or attack with an unready weapon, you can hold it. Sometimes keeping up the momentum of attack is more important than re-readying your weapon. You may wish to follow up a blow with a Shield Bash (Shields do not become unready), Slam, a kick or punch, an attack with a weapon in your off-hand, or take some other action -- like casting a spell or using a Psi power, or simply Moving away. Interrupting a two-turn ready maneuver for a Polearm (or any other multiple-turn-to-ready weapon) will force you to start over, however, so be careful.

Another thing to remember with Ready is that you can Fast-Draw any time during your turn; not only can you Fast-Draw a sword and swing it immediately, but you can throw a knife and immediately Fast-Draw a replacement. For example, you can start with a ready Throwing Axe, hurl it, and Fast Draw your sword immediately. The only down point is that if you fail the Fast-Draw roll, you *must* spend the next turn taking a Ready action (sidebar p. B105). Since presumably you wanted to draw the weapon anyway, this is not usually a problem. This does mean you cannot do more than take a Step on your next turn, which could be a problem if you suddenly need to run. Another trick is that dropping a weapon is a zero-time free action -- shields take a full second, but weapons do not. You could swing a Pick, making it unready (either due to having less than a 16 ST or it being stuck), drop it, and Fast-Draw a sword to parry with. Obviously, this is not a viable strategy for many turns -- you'll be dropping weapons constantly -- but it is useful in circumstances where you need to replace a weapon or cannot afford to take time to re-ready the one you've been using.

Attack

(pp. B104-105)

Attack is simple and straightforward. You Step, you Attack, or vice-versa. Still, there are some considerations to using this.

"Rain of blows" -- a common tactic is a continuous stream of blows aimed simply at forcing Active Defense rolls until the defender misses one and takes damage. The Rain of Blows should not be the be-all, end-all of tactics; it has some serious shortcomings. The most serious is that by doing this you are essentially betting that you will critically hit, or your opponent will fail to defend or critically fail to defend, before either you critically miss or your opponent scores on you. Fights between evenly matched foes can drag on into contests of failure. Worse, if you are facing multiple opponents, superior numbers will force you to make twice or more as many defense rolls to stay alive -- making your odds of survival that much worse.

Despite these issues, this tactic is not without merit and in fact has some very useful applications. The Rain of Blows is excellent against a flanked (-2 to defenses) or Stunned foe (-4 to defenses), a defenseless foe (from behind, or against a Berserk foe), or a foe with poor defenses (an unarmed defender with Brawling or Boxing against a swinging attack, or wielding a Whip). If you have a flail and are strong enough to have a zero ready time all of your foes are effectively at a disadvantage, making this tactic more productive. Fantasy warriors facing mages with magical defenses can use this method to burn through the fatigue pool of the mage by forcing casting after casting and multiple Will rolls to maintain concentration.

The Rain of Blows is also useful if your weapon outweighs that of your opponent by 3x or more -- each successful parry forces a check for weapon breakage (sidebar p. B111). Note that this tactic is useless if your opponent's weapon is Very Fine (or better) quality since those weapons will never break on a parry. Finally, if you are using the Damage

to Shield rule (sidebar p. B120) -- which is highly recommended -- this tactic is good for wearing down the shield of a Block-dependent foe.

Not all attacks are created equal, though. There are a few special attacks to consider:

Disarms

(p. B110)

Most effective for fencers, but certainly not limited to them. Specialized disarming weapons -- using Jitte/Sai skill -- are also available. Disarms, like Feint (see below), virtually require that you are more skilled than your opponent. If you are not, you are probably wasting your time. Disarm attempts are a Quick Contest of Skill, but with a penalty of -3 to -5 to the attacker's roll, depending on the size of the defender's weapon (see B110). Unless you have a fencing weapon, you are at a further -2. The defender also gets a bonus for having a heavier weapon. In other words, unless you are more skilled and are using a fencing weapon as heavy or heavier than the defender, you are at a penalty of -5 at a minimum.

Breaking Weapons

(pp. B109-110)

Remember that a character's weapons extend to the hex in front of them. This means a foe just out of reach still has his weapon within striking distance of your weapon. If you are properly prepared, you can take advantage and break it. Better yet, the defender's PD is irrelevant. You can take further advantage by using a Feint or striking the weapon first as part of a two-attack All-Out Attack to draw a parry. Weapons can be hard to hit, however -- even the largest weapons are -3 to hit (see B110).

If you intend to break weapons, you will want a Fine quality or Very Fine quality weapon. A superior quality weapon requires half the normal damage to break a lower-quality weapon. Superior quality weapons in the hands of your foes will reduce your chance of success.

Perhaps the most abusive example of weapon breakage is known best as the Fine Small Mace Guy. A ST 11 fighter with a Fine Small Mace (cost only \$90) does 1d+3 crush. The minimum damage, 4, is exactly the amount needed to break a Good or Cheap Broadsword. He can also break a Fine Broadsword on a 5 or 6 on a damage roll.

However, many GMs and players will find this breakpoint-hunting a little uncomfortable. The same setup with ST 12 does 1d+4, which converts to 2d if you use dice conversion. Suddenly, his automatic break goes away as his damage increases. The solution is to use the Modifying Dice + Adds rules on B114, with the addendum that +3 converts to 1d-1. The Fine Small Mace guy now does 2d-1, removing the automatic breakage.

Breaking Shields

Believe it or not, *GURPS* currently does not have any rules that allow you to directly target an opponent's shield. The following is an *Optional Rule*, and is *not* official. It is playtested and balanced with the weapon breaking rules.

Breaking Shields: You may strike at a foe's shield. A shield is considered to be in the same hex as the defender, and the shield can only be attacked from the front or shield side hex. The penalty to hit the shield is (-5+PD): -1 for a large shield, -2 for a medium shield, -3 for a small shield, -4 for a buckler. Damage is resolved normally for damage to a shield -- see sidebar p. B120.

You may Dodge or Block an attack on your shield -- Blocking represents turning the shield so the foe's blow misses or slides off it harmlessly. You may *not* Parry an attack on your shield. Your passive defense, including that of the shield, does not count into this defense!

This type of attack is very useful against foes who rely on the PD of their shield to defend. It is especially useful

against those foes who have little or no Shield or Buckler skill but who carry a shield for the PD. Shield breaking attacks are an excellent choice for attackers with high enough strength to destroy a shield in a single blow. The best defense against this kind of attack is to use an Iron or Bronze shield (see p. LT117).

Wild Swings

(sidebar p. B105)

Wild Swings are a very dangerous -- but occasionally useful -- technique. They are dangerous because in addition to a -5 to hit and a maximum skill of 9, they are *always* randomly aimed. While a -5/max 9 may not sound so bad when you are aiming at the body (total -5) or legs (-7), it is terrible when you end up aiming at the hands or feet (-9) or even the brain (-12). Plus, penalties for Bad Footing, shock, etc. can drop the skill further. Even a highly skill fighter usually ends up with a pretty low chance of success, and medium- or low-skill attackers can draw themselves into an increased risk of a critical miss. They are sometimes useful as part of a **Move** maneuver, but unless you absolutely cannot change facing, you are better off with a normal Step and Attack.

Shield Bashes

(p. B123)

Shield Bashes are often overlooked, but are an important tool in any fighter's arsenal. This is especially true if you have a weapon that needs to be readied between uses; sometimes, you just need an immediate follow-up. The damage on a shield bash is fairly low, but it is better than a punch and has fewer repercussions than a punch or kick if your foe parries.

Shields weigh a lot; even a Small Shield is 8 pounds. Add in a spike and you've made it heavy enough to force a broadsword to check for breakage. The common Medium Shield is 15 pounds, and an Iron Medium Shield (see p. LT117) weighs in at 30 pounds-- enough to force a Poleaxe to check for breakage. Allowing shields bashes to break parrying weapons like this is within the rules, but many GMs find it potentially abusive.

Because of the penalty to parry, and because of the risk of breakage, few people will parry. Against shieldless foes, this can be very effective. Shield Bashes are excellent for targeting weapons for breakage; parrying is at a penalty, and they usually have a chance to break even if they do parry. A Feint/Shield Bash combination aimed at a light weapon can spell disaster for the defender.

Thrown Weapons

(pp. B116-119)

A quick look at the Speed/Range Chart on B201 shows that 1 yard of range gives a +2 to hit. You can take advantage of this by throwing a weapon at point-blank. Fighters using most axes, spears, and knives can throw the weapon; it does not take a Ready action to heft the weapon to throw it if you already have it ready to fight with. Thrown weapons are also more difficult to parry (-1 or more, see B99), and in some cases do more damage thrown than they do wielded one-handed. Naturally, this is not a foolproof tactic; you will leave yourself without a weapon unless you can Fast-Draw something to replace it or have a weapon in your other hand. This tactic is especially useful for two-weapon fighters who use a throwable secondary (or even primary) weapon -- you always have this option ready but do not leave yourself defenseless after you use it. Throwing like this after a Feint will give you a better chance to hit and further reduce the defenses of the target above and beyond the benefit of the feint.

All-Out Attack

(p. B105)

The All-Out Attack is a potentially powerful tool -- but deadly to both the attacker and his target. One of the chief advantages of the All-Out Attack is that it allows for greater reach on the battle map. An All-Out Attack allows you to take extra steps *forward* that can enable you to reach a foe otherwise out of reach. AOAs also ignore bad footing -- on

a slippery, muddy battlefield, or one strewn with corpses, you can nimbly avoid the -2 or greater penalty to skill Bad Footing gives.

Be careful using All-Out Attack against a Waiting foe; even if you have a longer weapon and win the Contest of Skill, the Waiting foe will get both his attack for his Wait and his normal turn before you get your defenses back.

When should you use All-Out Attack? For some, it will never be worthwhile -- fencers and karatekas who depend on their parries and not their DR may never wish to trade it away. For others, especially those with On the Edge or Berserk, choosing something else is not an option. Each of AOA's four options are also useful in different ways, which will affect the choice to use an All-Out Attack or not.

1. *Two Attacks*: This is especially useful after a feint. It allows you to try and swamp you opponent's defenses. One Defense foes -- especially two-handed weapon wielders -- are vulnerable to swamping. One especially useful option is to attack the shield or weapon first, if you believe you have a good chance of breaking your target. If you do, you deprive your foe of a defense just as he needs it to stop your next attack. This option is extremely popular for those facing *GURPS Magic* blocking spells like Iron Arm; only one Blocking spell per turn can be cast, so two successful strikes will ensure that at least one attack cannot be stopped cold by magic. Fighters using a weapon that needs re-readying cannot take advantage of this option; however, a Shield Bash or a strike from a weapon in the other hand can be used as the second attack.
2. *Feint and Attack*: This allows you to trade your defenses for a compressed rhythm in the Step and Feint, Step and Attack, Repeat sequence. This is risky, but if you need to attack *right now* this option is very useful. Like all Feints, you need a superior skill to make this option worthwhile.
3. *+4 to hit*: This option makes a difficult shot possible and a moderately risky shot a sure thing. A +4 to hit effectively makes the Brain only a -3 to hit and the Vitals a +1. This option is great for weapons that will become unready after a strike (or swing/impale weapons that have to be pulled out on the following turn). A +4 to hit is best used when you are sure your opponent cannot defend successfully. Target a location that will incapacitate your foe. Low skill attackers can use this option to offset their low skill.
4. *+2 damage*: This is excellent for finishing strikes when hitting is a sure thing. It is especially useful for low-damage attacks, such as thrusting attacks. A +2 can ensure armor penetration for a poisoned weapon or a strike on a high-multiplier location like Brain; that +2 damage nicely negates the 2 DR of the human skull.

Consider using an All-Out Attack after a Feint, or on a turn following a successful Wait maneuver. A foe who that is wounded, Stunned, or knocked down can be especially vulnerable to an AOA. If your foe suffered Shock penalties as a result of your Wait, you can immediately follow up with a AOA Feint and Attack in order to lock in the penalty from the injury and finish your foe on the same turn.

Step and Feint

(p. B105-106)

"[Feint] can be a lifesaver -- or a total waste of time. Use it wisely." -- GURPS Basic, p. 96.

A frequent complaint in *GURPS* is that a highly skilled warrior has the same chance as a rank amateur to defeat the defenses of a foe. Regardless of the skill of the attacker, the defender's active defenses are just as effective against either. Feint is the maneuver that allows a skilled attacker to use his skill to defeat a foe -- a highly- skilled attacker using Feint can cut through lower-skilled defenders with comparative ease. Simply Feint, then Attack, each foe in turn. One reason people prefer to just Attack is that using Feint followed by an Attack will cost you two turns instead of one . . . automatically halving the potential number of foes you can disable. With a sufficient skill, you can definitely penetrate the defenses of one foe every other turn instead of potentially penetrating those of two foes in two turns (or just as likely, fail to penetrate the defenses of either).

Important things to remember with Feint are that

- a. Feints do not make unbalanced weapons unready;
- b. Feints only affect your next turn's attack (or attacks, if you All Out Attack);

c. Feints are basically useless against defenders much more skilled than you.

Feint is without any real risk; you can't Critically Miss and drop your weapon, your weapon does not become unready, and your defenses are not reduced by trying it.

The "tempo" of Feint is Feint, Attack, Feint, Attack. You Feint to lower the opponent's defenses and attack to take advantage. Assuming the blow wasn't telling and didn't create an opportunity to press, you go for another Feint. However, there are two common exceptions to this rhythm. First, you can fail to Feint successfully. Or you can win by a margin you consider small enough to be as good as a failure (which can be as low as only a -1 to defend or as much as 5+ points against an exceptionally skilled foe). In this case, a useful tactic is to immediately Feint again, hoping for a better result.

One especially vicious use of Feint is as a follow up to a successful attack, while your foe is still penalized from Shock. Because Shock lowers DX, his ability to resist a Feint is lowered. This allows you to potentially "lock in" his Shock penalty as a defense penalty -- which Shock otherwise does not penalize.

GMs commonly run Feint openly -- that is, you know exactly how the contest turned out, even if you don't know what the GM was rolling against. This gives you the advantage of knowing just how well you have succeed. However, if the GM conceals the results, the only thing you know is how well you rolled. The best way to handle these situations is to use the standard Feint tempo: Feint, Attack, Feint, Attack. You will have to gauge for yourself how well you are doing against a given foe.

Attackers with weapons that require a ready time should lean heavily on Feints. Since Feints do not make unbalanced weapons unready, you can Feint until you have inflicted a steep penalty on your foe. Because your weapon needs to be readied (or even yanked back out of a foe and *then* readied if swing/impale) you need to ensure your blows tell. Polearm wielders should take advantage of the fact that polearms do not become unready if used to parry -- defend and Feint until you have the opening you need.

Step -- Feinting and Stepping Back is a useful maneuver, but you will often be stepping out of range. If you have a weapon with reach (1,2) you can use this when you are adjacent to your foe; even if the foe Steps back on his turn, your step will bring you back into range. This "Feint and Step Back" move is also useful if you are being pressed closely, or if you want to keep a foe at range. It can also fake out a foe who you want to put some space between -- if you Feint and Step back, your foe may step away on his turn to prevent you from following up, playing into your hands. On your next turn you can step back and Wait, preventing him from reaching you without a Move or All Out Attack. If he just steps, his *weapon* may be in range -- and your feint will reduce his chance of avoiding a direct attack on his weapon.

Step and Wait

(p. B106)

Wait is one of the most misunderstood maneuvers. If the chance to interrupt does not come up, many people regard the Wait as "wasted." This is untrue; it is often better to wait for a better opportunity than to attack furiously, leaving yourself unable to seize those opportunities that arise.

Wait can effectively give you two shots at a foe on one of his turns; your Wait interrupts his turn, and you will get your next turn before his next turn rolls around again. This means Wait is especially effective if your foe only has one or two effective defenses; you can try to swamp his defenses. Wait is also useful because if you Stun your foe during his turn, he cannot roll to become unstunned until the beginning of his next turn. This can allow you to follow up against a foe with lowered defenses.

Wait creates a "zone of attack," similar to the "zone of control" that wargamers will be familiar with. Your Zone of Attack consists of those hexes that someone is threatened with direct attack if they enter. The Zone of Attack consists of your front hexes -- see sidebar p. B102 for a chart of Front hexes. A person with a 1 hex weapon has a 3-hex Zone (straight ahead, ahead-right and ahead-left). A person with a weapon with reach (1,2) has an *eight* hex Zone -- the

three adjacent front hexes, and the five hexes 1 yard past them. A person with a weapon with reach (1,2*) has either a three or five hexes, depending on how the weapon is being held. Don't forget your hands and feet -- a person taking a Wait while holding a Spear at reach 2 can threaten the 5 hexes at reach 2 with the spear and the three hexes with a kick.

A Waiting combatant can often force a foe to detour or take a Wait himself to avoid the potential double strike of the Waiting combatant. If everyone detours, your Wait will not be sprung, but you will have restricted the use of the area of your Zone, which can be just as useful if you need to delay your foes.

Wait is more strongly affected by your choice to Step before or Step after than other maneuvers. If you Step before you Wait, you give yourself the option to step backwards. Wait restricts you to stepping forwards after interrupting, but does not restrict you at all when you first take the maneuver. If you Wait and reserve your step, you essentially extend your Zone of Attack -- if you threatened everyone at reach 1 before, now you threaten them at both reach 1 and 2, since you can step into any of your reach 1 hexes.

All-Out Defense

(pp. B106, CII56-57)

There isn't much in the way of tactics here; you use All-Out Defense when you do not want to get hurt. However, you are completely without offensive actions. Because Shock does not lower defenses, All-Out Defense is extremely useful if you have become injured. If you are suffering from Stunning or Shock, you can take an All-Out Defense to frustrate attempts by your opponents to follow up and finish you off.

All-Out Defense also gives you twice your normal complement of active defenses -- and Fencing gets unlimited parries. *GURPS Compendium II* also added an option to All-Out Defense: taking a +2 to one defense instead of taking two defenses.

1. *Two Defenses per attack*: Knowing which defense to use can be tricky. In general, choose the best defense you have against an attack and your next-best defense if that fails to stop the attack. However, if you have only Dodge and another defense, roll Dodge first. If the Dodge succeeds, you will not use up one of your limited number of Parries or Blocks. The only time to choose Dodge second in this case is if your Dodge score is low enough to make a critical failure likely.
2. *+2 to one defense*: This option is very useful if you only have a single defense to rely on -- such as Dodge, or Parry if you have Fencing -- or if a +2 is all the margin you need to push your defenses from a potential success into a sure thing. This option is also useful to partly counteract the -4 to Active Defense from Stunning or the penalty from a Feint.

A character taking an All-Out Defense can also be a useful anchor for a line of combatants, or hold off multiple lesser skilled opponents while awaiting reinforcement. However, an All-Out Defense is primarily defensive and will not directly help you eliminate opponents. It can prevent them from eliminating *you*.

Move

(pp. B102-103, 107)

Move, simply put, is best used to get around. It does have a very directly offensive action included in it: Slam. While Slams are technically Close Combat, which is outside the scope of this discussion, Slams are most commonly used when the attacker wishes to avoid grappling.

Slams are most effective with a big shield and a running start, but strong attackers can Slam successfully from a dead start. Slams are useful for putting low-ST foes prone to open them up for finishing attacks, or to just get them out of the way. If possible, Slam from the side or back, or Slam a wounded opponent still suffering from shock; the DX penalty from shock will help prevent your foe from avoiding your attack. Be careful when using Slam because a failure can put you behind your foe (facing away, and vulnerable to a 180-degree turn on a Step and Attack or even an

All-Out Attack) or put you on the ground. Slam not only requires a high ST to be effective, but also a good DX to hit your target.

One possibility for the desperate -- but not desperate enough for an All-Out Charge -- is to execute a Slam immediately preceded by or followed by a Wild Swing. The Wild Swing can be used either to distract, and possibly injure the defender to soften him up for a Slam, or be used to follow-up on a hopefully prone foe.

One note: Feints do not help in the Contest of DX for Slams. If you need to Feint before a Slam to ensure you hit your foe, use All-Out Charge (see below).

All-Out Charge

(p. CII56)

An All-Out Charge is essentially a Move with an All-Out Wild Swing tacked on. The first two options are identical to the last two options of All-Out Attack, and should be used in the same manner.

Option c, an attack at -5 skill followed by a Slam, is functionally identical to a Move and Wild Swing followed by a Slam, except that All-Out Charge removes the random location and skill cap. If this option is chosen, the best bet is to choose a target that will help your Slam succeed. A limb hit, especially a leg hit, is ideal. A crippling blow to any limb will stun your foe; a leg cripple will drop him prone. A Stunned foe is less able to avoid your Slam; a fallen foe doesn't even need to be Slammed. Since injury will lower the DX of a foe (unless he has High Pain Threshold), any injury will help you successfully Slam your foe.

Option d, a feint at -5 skill followed by a Slam, is best used when a weapon attack would be futile. Against a foe with high defenses or high DR, or when you are armed with an inferior weapon or no weapon at all, an attack might not be worth the risk. Remember also that your foe must see the feint to fall for it; this option is less than useful when running a foe down.

And yes, as CII says, All-Out Charge is very useful to chase down fleeing foes. Remember, though, that foe can go from a Move with a Sprint bonus to a Step and Attack instantly; if you run up to and fail to disable your foe, he can change facing on his turn and attack.

Active Defenses

The rules with Active Defenses are simple: Don't let your opponents swamp you, choose the best one you have, and roll low. Besides those simple rules, there is one additional tactic to consider: Retreat.

Retreat gives you a +3 to your defenses and allows you to take a step (in any direction away from your attacker) on someone else's turn. The +3 can turn a moderate defense into a high defense, and combined with All-Out Defense can make it nearly impossible for an attacker to penetrate your defenses for one attack. You have placed a hex between yourself and the attacker. If your attacker took his Step first, you have opened a gap you can use to flee, consolidate your retreat on your turn, or keep your distance if you have a longer weapon.

A common mistake with Retreat is to rely on it too heavily. Do not depend on Retreat. If you can only defend yourself successfully with the +3 from Retreat, you are vulnerable to being hemmed in, driven against a wall, cliff, or occupied hexes, and so on. By retreating, you are allowing a foe to drive you backwards, possibly into a worse position than you started in. You also will be less reliable as a comrade, since your friends will potentially have their flanks exposed as you need to retreat away from attacks. A clever attacker may also deliberately attack you in the hopes of forcing you away from a comrade to allow your friend to be surrounded by the attacker's friends. Turnabout is fair play, however - as an attacker, try to maneuver to channel a Retreat-using foe into a bad position or divide him from his buddies.

Good luck, happy fighting, and may your Feints always work.

* * *

This article would not have been possible without the deaths of so many imaginary people. This article is dedicated to them. Thanks especially to Sean Punch, Bob Huss, Dan Howard, Ralph Melton and to all of the players I've ever GMed for.

*References: **GURPS Basic**, **GURPS Compendium II**, and the Krommnotes at <http://www.krommnotes.org/>*

Weaker Than Thou

Back in 1837, we asked a poll question that went a little something like this:

How powerful do you like your characters to be in RPGs you play in, compared to the rest of the populace?

Gods among men! I like really powerful characters. (Four-Colored Supers, High Magic, <i>In Nomine</i>)	2%
Powerful! I like characters with abilities far different from normal people. (<i>Vampire, Mage, Jedi</i>)	8%
Highly competent! I like characters that are still human, but incredibly skilled. (Batman, James Bond, <i>Black Ops</i>)	13%
Competent! I like characters that are human, but still more skilled than normal folks. (<i>X-Files, Dungeons & Dragons, Call of Cthulhu</i>)	33%
Normal! I like my characters human. (some <i>Traveller</i> games)	4%
Men among gods! I like playing weak characters among very strong forces. (<i>Bunnies & Burrows</i>)	0%
It depends. I like playing lots of different power levels.	36%
Dude! I don't roleplay!	0%
Other. It's the information age, and I can write the editor, should I be so inclined.	0%

Now, the other day I was discussing various campaign power levels with a friend, and I realized that, 1) I've run or played in all these kinds of games, and 2) I might be able to share some tips and pointers for making these various kinds of power levels work, which will, in turn, 3) take up four to six weeks' worth of columns. And what better way to kick this column series off than with the "Men among gods!" option, the power level that got a whopping **0%** and is thus sure to generate a column that's as beloved and popular as my [cryptogram](#) column.

Okay, first question: *Why* would you want to play in a campaign where the characters are below-average in power level?

Well, there are a few reasons and things to keep in mind when contemplating this type of game.

Perception. What is a sewer drain? Well, it's that grate-thingee where all the water pours into when it rains too hard . . . if you're a human. But what if you're a kitten? Well, then that same mundane sewer drain becomes a deathtrap if you're caught in a swift current during a heavy rainstorm. Things that we don't even give a second thought to in the "real" world -- lawnmowers, wind chimes, tasty-looking bones in the middle of the street -- can suddenly become interesting dangers, curiosities, and treasures. What kind of tales *are* interesting if you're a [plush toy](#)? What is life like as a bee, or an ant, or a hamster? What would be an "earth-shattering" adventure for a group of patients in a mental hospital, all of them unable to leave, but able to (for some reason) experience and explore each others dreams?

Scope. Another interesting feature of many under-powered games is the ability to explore a limited area more fully than in other types of games. Thus in a typical spy or pulp game there tends to be a habit of "exotic" inflation: characters are impressed when they first go to Washington D.C., then Paris, then an undersea base, then *outer space* . . . until it's very difficult to come up with a new setting realistically. But in a game where all the characters are six inches tall and living in a university library, then an interesting adventure can revolve around going into the . . . *basement*.

In the same way that setting and threats can be more limited, so too can rewards. While the Tastiest Lettuce In The Glen probably wouldn't be much of a reward for your standard dungeon-dwelling adventurers, it *would* be a wondrous reward in a *Bunnies & Burrows* game.

Something different. This reason "Why?" is behind the reasoning to do *lots* of different campaigns, and thus bears repeating here.

Okay; you've made up your mind to give a weaker game a shot. Now what are some things to keep in mind, or some options to explore?

"Weak is relative." Remember that it's entirely possible to be a competent, normal person, and *still* be horrifically outclassed or overpowered by the world around you . . . or, perhaps more correctly, the world around you that stories would normally focus on.

For example, in recent years there has been an increased interest in stories set in super-hero universes, but told through the eyes of "normal" people. (This was probably started by the *Marvels* mini-series, but there have been many others.) Now, the story of the Fiery Fairy and his battle-to-the-death against Aquahydrowatery Lad is wildly different if told through the eyes of Joe Schmoe: Short-Order Cook when the two elemental combatants come smashing through the walls of his restaurant. A game set in the Dreaming, Asgard, or Heaven/Hell can feel entirely different if told from the point of view of minor dream spirits, weak godlings, or not-terribly-distinctive souls. A *Star Wars* campaign from the point of view of a group of random Death Star technicians has real -- if short-lived -- possibilities, despite the fact they're all weaker than the "principal" characters. ("Hmm; that's odd. We're getting some anomalous readings from the exhaust por . . . ") The classic tale of this sort is, of course, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

Knowledge. Probably the biggest question one needs to ask when establishing a "Weaker Than Thou" campaign is whether or not the main characters *know* they're weaker than the norm. In general this may be obvious; if you don't have powers Far Beyond Those of Mortal Men, and you work in a bar that caters to such a clientele, then you know to duck when the heat vision starts flying. Likewise if you're a bunny, you probably don't understand *what* those two-legs, vroom-vrooms, or chop-spits are. In other settings it may not be so obvious; do the Death Star technicians know there's a huge story taking place which they're barely a part of? And in other settings some characters may know the truth while others don't; the "most sane" member of the asylum dreamwalkers, for example, may see their situation with a clarity the rest of the group does not.

Of course, even if the characters don't understand the magnitude of their setting, the players probably will . . . unless the GM is particularly clever and/or evil. ("Okay; you're on your standard station technical readout duties, when you notice a man in a brown robe sneaking around. He seems to sense something, and clicks on a baton that ignites into some kind of force beam." "What, like Obi-Wan?" "He might be a member of the long-lost Jedi Knights, yes." ". . . HEY! We're technicians on the *Death Star*! You didn't say this was a *Star Wars* game!" "<wicked grin> Oh, didn't I? Must have slipped my mind . . .")

Whatever decision is reached regarding characters' knowledge of their place in the grand scheme of things can greatly affect the rest of the campaign. Ignorant bunnies might be blissfully unaware, while mundanes in a super-powered world might be acutely depressed at the prospect.

Through A Mirror, Weakly. One of the more interesting uses of an underpowered campaign is as a mini-series in an established campaign. For example, if the campaign normally revolves around a school of powerful wizards, then it might be fun as a change of pace to play as a band of villagers from a town in the vicinity of the school dealing with a weak demonling experiment that escaped the mages. Such a series can reinforce many of the themes of the game, but from a different point of view. Thus if a theme of the wizardly campaign has been "Power corrupts," then maybe the villagers need to deal with the demonling that is controlling the village . . . or maybe the villagers manage to capture and control the demonling, and he starts making offers of power to *them*.

Winning Isn't Everything . . . It May Not Even Be Possible! In a world where the protagonists are the chambermaids of Thor, it's highly unlikely that the characters will ever reach the level of power, skills, or renown as the greater gods. But they may still thwart a minor plot to discredit Odin, become celebrated as honored servants of the realm, or otherwise live interesting lives as servants. A bunny might become Leader of the Burrow, or merely manage to mate and have kids. And once the characters realize their lot in life is to be henchmen to a James Bond villain, *they* may realize they're not going to win in the same way the players do. Regardless, perhaps most importantly, the players

get to experience the world in a way they wouldn't be able to in a "normal" campaign.

One Can Play At This Game! Another interesting possibility for players is to design a character that's specifically weaker than the rest of the party. For example, if the campaign is a superhero game, one player might dump all his points into backgrounds, perks, and other "mundane" abilities. While everyone else can change the course of mighty rivers and bend steel in their bare hands, the "weak" character will be a normal guy . . . albeit one with probably money, contacts, the ability to find a parking space downtown, and so on. Such an idea will need to be discussed and considered carefully; it can be difficult to maintain two distinct foci in a game. But in some campaigns it's a great way to dabble in the alternate viewpoints a weaker power level world can provide. Even if such a "Weaker Than Thou" campaign doesn't last long -- and, given the popularity in the polls, this seems quite likely -- they can still provide something unique for jaded players. If nothing else, they should be that much more excited to get their *Deathblade* +5s back in their hands after a time of being terrified of Farmer Brown chasing them out of the lettuce patch.

* * *

Since I got yelled at last time I failed to mention my convention appearances in a timely manner, I thought I'd mention that I'm going to be in Atlanta at [DragonCon](#) this year, from August 30 through September 2 (which is, y'know, the standard time that DragonCon will be around).

In the non-gaming related world, I'll be in Orlando from August 2-4 for the [2002 World Yo-Yo Contest](#), in my highly skilled capacity as "trained monkey."

If you happen to be in the area for either one, stop by, say "Hi," and watch inappropriate people dressed as Sailor Moon or teenagers flinging pucks of plastic on strings at dangerous velocities, as appropriate.

* * *

*Last week's answer: **World of Synnibar**, p. i. (A lot more people got this one than I was expecting; if you happened to have gotten the right answer, stop by one of my two convention appearances mentioned above. I'll get you your cookie.)*

*(Three stars) "I dream of the first times¹
the longest memory
I speak of the first times²
The oldest Father
I sing of the first times
And the dawn of Darkness."*

Malfisance: Death And The Duchess of Malfi

"O, let us howl some heavy note,
Some deadly dogged howl,
Sounding as from the threatening throat
Of beasts and fatal fowl!"

-- John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, IV:ii:61-64

What is that noise? Is that the lamentation of Rachel, weeping for her children, for they are no more -- or is it the howl of wolves, slaving for bloody revenge? How loud must the howling get, to echo down through the centuries, or across the gates of death?

"A life lived in obscurity
Runs the danger of being short."

-- motto attributed to Pedro Luis, Cardinal Borgia

Giovanna d'Aragona became the Duchess of Amalfi (just south of Naples) at the age of fourteen when the Duke of Amalfi died in 1493 and put her husband on the ducal throne. Her family was a cadet branch of the royal house of Aragon; his was the old and locally influential Piccolomini clan. By all accounts, she was a good and devoted duchess, even after the new Duke died suddenly in 1498, leaving the Duchess and his posthumous heir to govern Amalfi. However, her brother, the Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona, was rising in Church politics, and Giovanna was too valuable an Aragona property for him to marry off again. Left to her own devices for several years, she fell in love with, and then secretly married, her major-domo, Antonio Bologna -- whose family line was distinctly bourgeois, and whose personal conduct doesn't bear up even under the very friendly scrutiny offered in Barbara Banks Amendola's *The Mystery of the Duchess of Malfi*. The idyll couldn't last, and finally Giovanna and her husband fled to Ancona, on pretext of making a pilgrimage, where she renounced her throne and prepared to live in simple domesticity with her three children by Bologna. The Cardinal could not allow the insult to his family, or the danger to his ambitions, to go unchecked. Fleeing Luigi's men from city to city, the lovers were separated; Giovanna and two children vanished into her brother's custody in 1512 and Antonio was murdered in Milan the next year by a mercenary named Daniele de Bozzolo. (His eldest son by Giovanna survived under Visconti protection.) Giovanna and the children were never seen again.

Not a long story, and what little of it we do know comes down to us through some fairly dubious channels. Matteo Bandello, a clerical gossip and friend of Bologna, wrote a *Novelle* on Giovanna's life around 1515, which was immediately pseudonymously copied and distributed in a series of increasingly slanderous "Corona manuscripts." An extremely lazy researcher, one Francois Belleforest, translated the *Novelle* into French in 1565, and it became one of many bawdy Italian tales translated and circulated in the English theatrical-erotic underworld, acquiring completely imaginary details of midnight strangulation, torture, and concealed bodies. And then, of course, it passed through the bloody arch of the Jacobean stage, and through the mind and pen of its second-greatest genius, John Webster.

"Webster was much possessed by death
And saw the skull beneath the skin;
And breastless creatures under ground
Leaned backward with a liplless grin."

-- T.S. Eliot, "Whispers of Immortality"

Webster makes Shakespeare look positively well-documented. His birth and death dates remain unknown, as does his life outside the theater. One "John Webster" entered the Middle Temple in 1598, and Webster's later play *The Devil's Law-Case* hints at legal training, but no John Webster was ever called to the bar. Webster wrote slowly (he takes a mean-spirited slap at the "happy and copious industry" of Shakespeare), and only wrote seven plays, the greatest of which is *The Duchess of Malfi*, most likely completed around 1612, exactly a century after the events it depicts. In Webster's play, the Duchess' brothers the Cardinal and "Duke Ferdinand" (a composite of her actual brother Carlo and her uncle, Duke Alfonso of Calabria) plant the spy Bosola in her house to make sure she doesn't remarry -- they stand to lose much if she does. (Ferdinand is also motivated by incestuous lust for and jealousy of the Duchess.) Bosola

discovers the horoscope of the Duchess' son by Antonio, lets Ferdinand into her bedchamber where she (not knowing her husband has left) reveals the secret in a one-sided conversation. Ferdinand gives way to "intemperate anger," imprisons the Duchess, and tortures her with wax corpses, a dead man's hand, and armies of lunatics, claiming Antonio is dead and hoping to break her spirit to his will.

When he cannot, he orders Bosola to kill her and the children, and then claims that she still lives to lure Antonio back into his grasp. Antonio returns, but Bosola has succumbed to conscience; he accidentally kills Antonio (thinking him Ferdinand), then actually kills both brothers. Ferdinand, who has gone completely mad after murdering his sister, also kills the Cardinal (for good measure) and Bosola. Only the Duchess' eldest son by Antonio remains alive. As lurid and appalling as its subject matter made it, Webster's play (and hence the Duchess' murder) left its indelible mark down the centuries, its spilt blood oozing into some extremely interesting corners.

*"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.'
I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.
'What is that noise?'
The wind under the door.
'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'"*
-- T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, lines 111-119

Eliot took this conversation, also about a woman and her absent husband, from an earlier poem called "The Death of the Duchess" about guess who. In Eliot's first draft of [The Waste Land](#), the disembodied voice answers her last question with, "Carrying away the little light dead people." Which, apart from being a truly creepy line, is an obvious further reference to Giovanna's children. But it gets even worse. Eliot's question, "What is that noise?" echoes Webster's Duchess' "What hideous noise was that?", asked about the mad spirits howling outside her cell. The line "The wind under the door" (spoken by the missing husband) deliberately echoes a different Webster line (from *The Devil's Law Case*) about a groan from a dead man. Eliot seems to hint that his colloquy, and hence Webster's play, concerns the dialogue between a couple separated not by distance, but by death.

Which, unnervingly, is an interpretation more than justified in Webster's story. The Duchess, by conversing with her absent husband in the first place, condemns him to death; Antonio, by believing the Duchess is still alive, dies. Ferdinand and the Cardinal send madmen to impersonate the damned, and build perfect wax statues of Antonio and the children to make the Duchess believe them dead -- after which the Duchess swears to "revive the rare and almost dead example" of the faithful wife, and wishes "to hold some two days' conference with the dead." Later, Antonio hears an echo from the Duchess' grave "so hollow and so dismal" that "many have supposed it is a spirit," yet "very like [his] wife's voice." Both lovers, the play hints, commune with the dead throughout. Ferdinand even gives the Duchess a dead man's hand, urging her to "send to him that owned it." The play twice mentions [mandrakes](#): is the Duchess given a main-de-gloire -- a hand of glory -- to similarly [knock](#) upon the gate of death and open a passage?

*"A very pestilent disease, my lord,
They call lycanthropia. . . .
In those that are possess'd with 't there o'erflows
Such melancholy humour they imagine
Themselves to be transformed into wolves;
Steal forth to church-yards in the dead of night,
And dig dead bodies up: as two nights since
One met the Duke 'bout midnight in a lane
Behind Saint Mark's church, with the leg of a man
Upon his shoulder; and he howl'd fearfully;
Said he was a wolf, only the difference
Was, a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside,*

*His on the inside; bade them take their swords,
Rip up his flesh, and try."*
-- John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, V:ii:5-19

Oh, and did I forget to mention that Duke Ferdinand is a werewolf? The doctor ascribes it to Ferdinand's "melancholy humour," but he apparently does go ghouling about the graveyard of a night. In Act IV he threatens Bosola that "the wolf shall find her [the Duchess'] grave, and scrape it up" -- an unwholesome hint of several varieties of awfulness. Ferdinand repeatedly mentions that his sister and he share the same "corrupted blood," and seems to think the Duchess has some lupine qualities herself. He calls her an "excellent hyaena", and her children her "cubs"; when Bosola finally strangles them (which is the way, of course, to kill something whose skin cannot be cut by weapons), Ferdinand announces that "the death of young wolves is never to be pitied." In a lengthy diatribe in Act III, he seems to believe that the wolf-spirit ("the howling of a wolf is music to thee") has somehow possessed his sister ("whate'er thou art, thou hast enjoyed my sister") and correctly believes that his attempt to exorcise it will "beget such violent effects as would damn [them] both." Does he somehow see the Duchess' werewolvary as tied to her marriage with the dead? Is this, in the final analysis, why he kills the sister he lusts for, so that his own inner werewolf can mate with her in the afterlife?

*"I know death hath ten thousand several doors
For men to take their exits; and 'tis found
They go on such strange geometrical hinges,
You may open them both ways: -- any way, for heaven-sake,
So I were out of your whispering. Tell my brothers
That I perceive death, now I am well awake."*
-- John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, IV:ii:219-224

The werewolf spirits here, that cross between the living and the dead through "ten thousand several doors", remind me of the astral werewolves allied with the [Benandanti](#) of Friuli -- who were operating during Giovanna's (and Webster's) lifetime. Friuli, of course, is right across the Adriatic from the two places Giovanna desperately attempted to reach in her flight, Ancona and Venice. Was Giovanna part of a [secret lineage of werewolves](#) infiltrating the Italian Renaissance? Did her older brother (the red-capped Cardinal) kill her to cover up the truth, or on orders from the amanita "[red cap](#)" mushroom-worshipping Johannine heretics behind the Medici? And did the mysterious John Webster (trained in the Templar court) somehow stumble upon the truth, perhaps hearing it in the whispers of [the spirits](#) bound into the mystic Globe by [Shakespeare's occult patrons](#)?

His play contains details that no other history of Giovanna's life reveals, such as the name of the Cardinal's mistress and the fact that Giovanna was a twin. She was, in fact, a posthumous twin, born after her father's death -- thus, in a sense, she was born with a window into the ghost world from the start. Her twin brother Carlo died, quite suddenly and documentably, on March 21, 1512 -- the vernal equinox, and one of the "eight corners of the year." After which, nobody ever documentably saw the Duchess again. Did she escape through the door that opens "both ways" on its "strange geometrical hinges"? Did, in fact, Giovanna climb through the doorway of her twin's death, using his dead man's hand to open it, and dictate her version of the story to John Webster exactly a century later in a whispered echo from beyond the grave? Perhaps someone, after all, pities the death of young wolves.

Pyramid Review

Exalted Storyteller's Companion (for Exalted)



Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

Written by Heather Grove, Dean Shomshak, and Adam Timworth

Art by Guy Davis, Michael Gaydos, Vince Locke, and Ron Spencer

80 page book + 4-panel screen; \$15.95

White Wolf doesn't sell game screens. They put together packages which comprise "companion" sets for Storytellers. These packages strive to provide more bang for the buck, including a book of extras to justify the sometimes considerable expense of the package. For the most part, the *Exalted Storyteller's Companion* succeeds.

The Storyteller screen itself is serviceable but not exceptional. The artwork on the outside is decent color manga, though the perspective is either skewed or deliberately exaggerated. The interior has some basic charts and the order of combat. There are some nice touches -- including the basic data for extras -- but there are some glaring omissions. Most notably, initiative (which would have taken up all of one line) is inexplicably absent.

The accompanying book, on the other hand, is excellent. Unlike most White Wolf books, there is very little in-character fiction. What the book *does* have is a series of chapters on the various enemies a Solar circle can expect to fight, a brief introduction and FAQ, and a few new toys to play with.

The empire of the Dragon-Blooded, or Terrestrial Exalted, is covered in-depth in the first chapter. This section goes into detail regarding the elemental powers and Byzantine lives of Creation's rulers, also known as "Dynasts." Childhood, social calendars, titles and their duties, naming practices, warfare, funereal practices, and more are well-covered in a short space. The pattern of a Dynast's life is shown literally from cradle to grave. As the Dragon-Blooded are among the most implacable enemies of the Solar Exalted (the game's default character type), this is all valuable information for a Storyteller who intends to make them important antagonists. A useful short section is a commentary on the derailed hunt for the Solars, and how some Dynasts might ally with them for their own purposes.

The section on Terrestrial Charms is likewise dense and useful. While each element is presented in brief, there are many guidelines for expanding the basics provided. In addition, by combining the basic Charms and examining the sample characters included in the core *Exalted* rulebook, competent and varied enemy Dragon-Blooded can be designed with ease. There is some question about which Terrestrials can use which Charms -- both have elemental aspects, and there's no comment on whether or not a Dynast can use a Charm that doesn't match his aspect -- but otherwise, the section is amazingly complete for so small a space. Elemental blasts, telepathy, super-strength, healing herbs, and the ubiquitous anime leap are all examples of Dragon-Blooded Charms.

The weakest section, unfortunately, is the chapter on non-Solar Celestial Exalted. This includes the Lunar Exalted (shape-shifting warriors reminiscent of World of Darkness werewolves), Sidereal Exalted (masters of fate, spirits, and astrology), and Abyssal Exalted (anti-Solars and champions of the undead realms). While each subsection presents the basic outlooks of each variety, these Celestials get comparatively short shrift. The Lunars, in particular, are given the beginnings of a fascinating warrior culture, but the section just seems to . . . stop. Their Charms are weakly described and few examples are given, leaving a Storyteller who wants to use them just enough of a taste to hunger for more. Likewise, the Sidereals are difficult to work out statistics for. However, they receive a fair amount of description in

terms of their culture and positions. Their current place as distant manipulators makes them fairly easy to use as patrons of antagonists, if not characters in their own right. This is disappointing, but not nearly as difficult to use as the Lunar section.

The Abyssals, meanwhile, are fairly easy to incorporate. While they are very different from all other forms of Exalted in concept, in practice they are nearly identical to the Solars who form the basis of the core book. Most of the magic therein can be used with identical rules for the Abyssals, by just changing the effect's appearance. While a Solar would fire a beam of cleansing light from her sword, an Abyssal would reach out his gauntlet and suck the life out of his victim. The game effect is ultimately the same. There are some differences, and again the section fails to include guidelines for advancing abilities, but the very nature of the Abyssals as anti-Solars makes the problem a minor one.

In contrast, the third chapter, "Spirits and Spirit Courts," is easily the strongest section of the book. Almost a complete mini-supplement in itself, the spirit chapter provides more than enough magic, culture, characters, and guidelines to create any spirit or elemental being a Storyteller might need. Unlike the other chapters, there are several example spirits as well as a whole host of new powers for them to use. Seasonal courts, creatures embodying the five elements of *Exalted*, and demons ready for summoning or slaying round out the chapter.

The spirit section alone is nearly worth the price of the book. Rich with new powers, plot hooks, and subtle advice on handling the alien outlooks of these creatures, the real genius of this chapter is in customization. Both the spirit Charms and the sample entities are designed to be modular rather than specific, while providing more than enough information to play out of the book. For example, a spirit with the ability to impose a Malediction might curse its foes with reduced skills, attributes, energy, overall bad luck or some twisted variant of another Charm. It remains to be seen whether White Wolf can expand on the *Companion* sufficiently to justify a separate supplement on the subject. It's that good.

Rounding out the book is a small chapter (really an appendix, despite the name) with a few new magical artifacts. While there are only a few examples, they help to get the feel of Exalted magic across and add flavor to the setting. None are weak devices; the least of them allows the wearer to body-slam spirits. A supreme artifact is also included -- the mighty Eye of Autochthon, older than the gods and powerful enough to rearrange reality at will. Fans of *Mage* might recognize the problem with a mortal wielding this sort of insane power; godlike control of Creation is accompanied by godlike backlash. There are no second chances with the Primordial's power -- one botch and the character is very permanently dead.

One of the book's greatest overall strengths is its consistency. Unlike some recent efforts by even the largest gaming companies (including White Wolf itself) the *Companion* suffers from few if any serious "breaks" in rules or editing. Even where the rules are sparse, they're solid, and the color text hardly ever bites its own tail. The interior art is likewise of good to excellent quality, particularly the gorgeous manga-style chapter-opening drawing.

Despite a weak middle section and a merely adequate Storyteller's screen, the *Exalted Storyteller's Companion* is definitely a cut above the average "filler" screen book. It's highly recommended for Storytellers wishing to expand on the roster of empowered beings that Solars can interact with, and it's also of considerable use to players whose characters can learn such magic as well as anyone looking for something different or exotic in their *Exalted* game. If White Wolf keeps putting out books of this quality for *Exalted*, fantasy gaming may soon have a new standard.

--Peter Flanagan

Kung-Fu Crucible

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Genre: Martial Arts Action (plus Options)

Style: Conspiracy, Combat Action, Mystery

Austerity: Mostly Realistic to Really Most Sincerely Wuxia

Themes: Mastery, Revenge, Discovery, Synthesis, Paranoia

Campaign Setting and Background Information

Somewhere in a remote location (see *OPTION: Do You Know The Way To Shangri-La?*) is a small village on a misty lake. All who live there are masters of the martial arts. They fight amongst themselves, using mystical techniques and physical prowess. While arduous to enter this conclave, it is doubly difficult to leave . . .



What Everybody Knows

The Crucible

The Crucible is an isolated hamlet, dedicated to the discovery, cultivation, and expression of martial arts. The residents (around 60 men and women of varying ages) come from many lands, to learn and to teach their skills. Not merely limited to the techniques of combat, their knowledge encompasses philosophy, art, and the potentials inherent in human life force -- or *chi*.

The Rules

All of the Crucible's inhabitants must abide by the following rules, or suffer

**OPTION: Do You Know
The Way To Shangri-**

severe consequences:

1. Other than these Rules, the Young Master's word is Law.
2. You must fight, train, or serve every day.
3. Fights continue until a combatant surrenders, falls unconscious, or dies.
4. No weapons.
5. You may only leave the Crucible with the Young Master's permission.
6. You may not fight outside of the Arena or the Training Chamber of a Hall.
7. Anyone may compete in the Great Tournament.

Two groups uphold these commandments: the Invisible Judges and the Fu Dogs.

- *Invisible Judges*: Any other dweller in the Crucible may secretly be an Invisible Judge. They are the Young Master's spies. They hide among the inhabitants and report Rules infractions and other items of interest to the Young Master. No one knows how many of there are. They receive an extra jade chit daily (see below, *Chits*).
- *Fu Dogs*: These identical beings always operate as a pair (according to legend, one should be male and the other female, but it's difficult to tell which is which). They are large (9') humanoid figures made of an unknown substance coated in red lacquer. Their features are those of a *keiloon* -- a beast bearing a lion's head with horns, a deer's body with scales, and a tail made up of little curls. They are incredibly strong and tough, if a bit slow and not particularly intelligent. They can swim, climb, and jump long distances. While used predominantly to capture villagers attempting to escape, they have also been used to execute Rules-breakers. They follow the orders of the Young Master and any Invisible Judge, and are seemingly quartered in the caves under the Bell (see below).

Fight Economics

According to Rule #2, those who do not fight or train daily do not eat. Here's how that works:

- *Chits*: There are three types of chit: jade, ivory, and pearl. Ivory chits are worth five jade chits; pearl chits are worth twenty jade chits. Chits may be broken in half, but no smaller.

A jade chit can be exchanged for two rations of food (suitable for a basic balanced meal, in ready-to-eat form or for self-preparation) or for other goods (a pack of cigarettes, a bottle of beer, a pot of tea, simple ornamentation, writing implements, etc.) at the General Store or the Café. Ivory and pearl chits bring commensurately larger amounts -- or higher quality -- of goods. The Young Master distributes these chits, in person or by proxy.

- *Training*: After each training session, each participant is given a jade chit. The teacher is given an additional jade chit. Sometimes, the Young Master assigns a warrior to teach for a period of time, but typically, it's left up to the leadership of the Halls to select trainers. While training usually occurs within individual Halls, the Young Master has also instructed groups of Halls to offer joint-training sessions.
- *Scheduled Bouts*: The Young Master schedules several Bouts daily, some between warriors of the same halls, others between fighters from

La?

Where is the Crucible located? In a mountain valley of the Himalayas? In the deep caves of a fantasy world? In the caldera of a volcano? On an uncharted Pacific Island? Is it a constructed environment within a space station or starship? Could it be a far-future Virtual Reality?

Each of these choices of environment should have an impact on the character, theme, and adventures of a Kung-Fu Crucible campaign. Various implementations of this Option (and others) are explored in the *Spins* offered below.

OPTION: Ease of Entry/Exit

Determination of how "open" or "closed" the Crucible is has a strong effect on a campaign set inside it. Is it completely open and known of, so that any may settle down there? Are there trials to win entry? Or is it open only after a long quest? Can a character be invited to the Crucible, or must one be abducted and brought to the village by force?

Furthermore, how easy is it to leave the hamlet? Can one just depart, with no fear of reprisal? Is there a set term one must reside there? Or do its inhabitants stay imprisoned until escape, death, or victory in the

Great Tournament (whichever comes first)?

different halls. Sometimes the combatants are named explicitly, other times the request is for any fighter from a hall, and still other times, a specific fighter is charged to take on any martial artist from a particular hall. These Bouts are held at various locations; audiences usually gather to watch. Some Bouts are held in secret, and onlookers are reprimanded. However, warriors have been *ordered* to attend a Bout, and are disciplined if they are not present. The severity of punishment ranges from Public Service to Execution, depending on the Young Master's whim (see below, *Public Service*).

The rules of these Bouts are usually:

1. To first blood;
2. To a specified number of "points";
3. To surrender; or
4. To knockout.

Rarely are they to the death. The loser receives a jade chit, while the winner of the Bout gets an ivory chit. The Young Master or a warrior designated by him serves as the judge of the match.

- *Minor Tourneys*: Minor Tourneys happen monthly. They can involve any number of warriors' halls, and are held in the Arena. While the Young Master occasionally orders individuals to compete (or bars them from it), Tourneys are otherwise open to all. Otherwise, they follow the scoring of Scheduled Bouts. Usually a single-elimination competition, warriors may fight as individuals or teams. All competitors receive two jade chits, second place gains two ivory chits, and the winner of a Tourney receives a pearl chit. The Young Master or his designee serves as judge. Tourneys are a popular and well-attended social event.
- *The Great Tournament*: The Great Tournament happens once a year, and many believe it's the reason for the Crucible's existence. Much like a Minor Tourney, warriors may be directed to enter; however, unlike the lesser contest, no one can be barred from competition by Rule #7. All participants receive two ivory chits; second place gains two pearl chits, while the winner receives the Prize (see *OPTION: What Is The Prize?*). The Young Master *always* serves as judge for the Tournament.
- *The Injured and Sick*: Injured warriors are taken to the Hospital for treatment. Under the direction of the Young Master and his aides, patients are healed of even mortal wounds. The injured and sick are provided food and drink without needing chits (additionally, many villagers have their store of chits -- or collections from their friends -- to purchase luxuries). Patients share a large common ward while recuperating, which has led to heated altercations between irate wounded.

Pregnant Crucible-dwellers are also taken to the Hospital, but are not housed in the common ward -- indeed, they are taken somewhere else in the structure, and are not seen again. If they do return, it is with no memories of their Hospital stay, and they are no longer pregnant.

- *Public Service*: For infractions of the Rules or other commands of the Young Master (those not meriting summary execution), the criminal is barred from Bouts and Tourneys and sentenced to Public Service for a term of days or even weeks. Public Service tasks include janitorial duties; caring for the grounds, the Zen Garden, or the Koi Pond; working in the General Store or Café; laboring on the farm across the Lake, milking the cows and goats or tending the fields; or assisting the Young Master at the Hospital. While so serving, the offender receives only half a jade chit daily.

The Warrior Halls

There are four halls that house the inhabitants of the Crucible. When someone arrives in the village, they are given a new name (see below, *Names*) by the Young Master and assigned to one of these halls. Warriors are most often sorted by their martial art forte, but this is not a hard and fast rule. Each group has a particular color for their *gi* jackets, have their own method of internal organization, specific regulations, and their own specialties in martial style.

OPTION: What is the Prize?

Depending upon other Options in play, the Prize of the Great Tournament could be prosaic:

Each hall contains individual living quarters, several classrooms, a refectory, a kitchen, a training chamber, a meditation room, and a bathhouse.

- *The Beasts' Den*: Their jacket is red. The martial specialties of the Beasts are strikes, holds, and feints. Organizational hierarchy is based on the numeric portions of Names (see below, *Names*), with lower numbers equating to high status. Beasts are not permitted to pool their chits for the sick or injured; if they do, they are taken to the Young Master for punishment.
- *Harvest Hall*: Their jacket is green. The martial specialties of the Harvesters are blocks, breaks, and throws. Organizational hierarchy is based on the numeric portions of Names (see below, *Names*), with higher numbers equating to high status. Harvesters must pool their chits for the sick or injured; if they don't, they are taken to the Young Master for punishment.
- *House of Ideals*: Their jacket is white. The martial specialties of the Ideals are leaping attacks, dodges, and kicks. Organizational hierarchy is based on drawing by lots: when a new member joins the hall, all Ideals draw marbles from a deep vase. The Ideal who draws the white marble is designated leader of the hall, until the next member joins. Ideals are encouraged to pool their chits for the sick or injured, but if they don't, there are no repercussions.
- *The Metals' Forge*: Their jacket is blue. The martial specialties of the Metals are spinning techniques, parries, and ripostes. Organizational hierarchy is by vote: when a new member joins the hall, all Metals verbally vote for who they wish to lead them. The Metal who wins the vote is designated leader of the hall, until the next member joins. Metals are discouraged from pooling their chits for the sick or injured, but if they do, there are no repercussions.

money, respect, fame. Or it could be esoteric: power (perhaps the winner gains the chi of all the opponents he defeated), leadership (the winner becomes the new Young Master), or the right to fight in a Greater Contest (defending the Earth from evil spirits, aliens, demons, etc.). In some games, the Prize could simply be permission to leave the Crucible . . . or immortality.

Names

When someone enters the community of the Crucible, they lose their name and gain a new one. The Young Master assigns this name, which is of two parts.

The first part of the name is a word that describes the warrior and indicates the hall that he joins. See *TOOL: The "Special Move" Naming Chart* for quick and dirty random names. Beasts are given animal names (Table B), Harvesters those of plants (Table C), Ideals those of qualities or virtues (Table D), and Metals those of a type of metal (Table E). Multiple warriors in a hall can share the same word. Also, the Young Master is not limited to using the Tables to assign names.

The second part of the name is a number. Only the Young Master knows his reasons for the number given. Multiple warriors can share the same number, so long as they do not share the same "first name."

Examples of this scheme would be Dragon 6, Radish 12, Chastity 23, or Molybdenum 3.

If warriors change halls, their names change, including the numeric portion.

Warrior Hall Interaction Matrix

The Interactions between the different warrior halls is rather straightforward, as indicated below.

How Group

<i>Feels About:</i>	Beasts' Den	Harvest Hall	House of Ideals	Metals' Forge
Beasts' Den	X	Allies	Rivals	Neutral
Harvest Hall	Allies	X	Neutral	Rivals
House of Ideals	Rivals	Neutral	X	Allies

Esoteric/Chi/Fu Powers

The purpose of the Crucible is to discover, refine, and teach the hidden techniques of the martial arts. This emphasis makes the Crucible an interesting place. Every inhabitant knows secret strikes and physical mysteries, and is encouraged to use them, in combat, while doing Public Service, and in their day-to-day lives. How invasive this use is depends upon the level of austerity (see below, *Austerity*) that martial arts abilities are held to. See *OPTION: How Strong Is Your Kung Fu, Anyway?* for further details. In a Chambara-level Crucible:

- Every meal is served as if the refectories were Japanese steakhouses, with flipping food and flashing knives.
- Villagers leap from tree to tree to harvest fruit and nuts.
- The scent of burning moxa perfumes the environs of the Hospital, where acupuncture and the laying on of hands are primary medical treatments.
- Dead wood is cut and stacked with a flurry of chops, kicks, and throws.

Even at the highest levels of Real World fidelity, however, a warrior's special attacks and defenses will have special names, in keeping with the dictates of the genre. Every character should have a short list of their favored maneuvers . . . even if those maneuvers are functionally the same. It's the style that's important. See *TOOL: The "Special Move" Naming Chart* generate random names for such attacks and defenses.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

The Young Master

The Young Master rules the roost. His dictates (provided they do not conflict with the Rules) are strongly enforced, and can be as whimsical or calculated as the GM sees fit to inflict on the PCs. The Young Master's pronouncements can lead to paranoia, quibbling, and humor -- or all at once. The Young Master is responsible for designing the schedule of Bouts and Tourneys, delivering packets of chits to Bout Judges and trainers, and meting out punishment. The Young Master acts as a scientist -- using the warriors as the raw material, catalysts, and reagents -- to develop more and stronger chi abilities, by any means necessary (possibly including eugenics; see *The Injured and Sick* for more). But is he experimenting for his own ends, or for someone else? If the latter (or if the answer to the *OPTION: What is the Prize?* is "leadership"), he might be replaced at any time . . . perhaps by a "Young Mistress."

Invisible Judges

At least 10% of the populace are Invisible Judges, but at times that number may be much higher. (For particularly paranoia-inducing games, perhaps every NPC is secretly an Invisible Judge; to turn *that* up to eleven, perhaps all PCs and NPCs are spies, except for a single "lucky" PC. If one wishes to get really silly, all characters in the Crucible are secretly Invisible Judges!)

Fu Dogs

Depending upon the overall setting (fantasy, "realistic," or science fiction), the Fu Dogs could be monsters, spirits, men in armor, robots, or computer programs. What's important about them is that they're very tough and resistant to chi effects, quite strong, slow (initially, but speedy on straight shots), and

OPTION: What is the Crucible?

An important question of a Kung-Fu Crucible campaign is simply: "What is the Crucible?"

The Crucible can be:

- *An Athletic Tournament:* Though eccentric, the Crucible could be simply a highly regarded martial arts competition.
- *Exciting Entertainment:* Perhaps the Crucible is the set of for combat entertainment. The Crucible can be the cynosure for a martial arts "reality TV" show to pro-wrestling style glitz-kata to mass-media gladiator blood sports.
- *An Experiment:* Perhaps the villagers have been assembled to brew like the ingredients of an

rather dim. They're used to capture escapees with little relative harm (perhaps with a knock-out touch or taser fist?) and execute criminals. The warrior who defeats a Fu Dog in combat -- it hasn't happened yet -- will be legend (and will probably have an immediate interview with the Young Master).

NPC Backgrounds

- **Cougar 1:** This balding man is the leader of the Beasts. Cougar 1's squat frame belies a fluid power. A master wrestler, his secret move is called the "Celestial Drunkard's Hug," and has defeated many opponents. Partial to dark beers and roasted meats, he is a terrible singer (but believes he has a good voice).
- **Fortune 10:** Handsome and dark, this gambler is known for his skill at dice and his "Invisible Monkey Kick." A devotee of astronomy and astrology, he often spends whole evenings lying on a mountainside, stargazing.
- **Kale 9:** Tall, handsome, and muscular, Kale 9 is much in demand among the ladies in the Crucible. And he has plenty of supply. When he isn't haunting the shade of the Grove, he's flipping his competitors flat with his patented "Harlem Asphalt Throw."
- **Muskrat Zero:** Muskrat Zero is a midget who never speaks. Whether this is the cause or the result of his position as the Young Master's major domo is unknown. It is rumored that given his name and number, he is the secret alpha male of the Beasts' Den. He knows numerous secrets; sometimes, while watching particular warriors, will shake his head and sigh sadly. His secret move is unknown.
- **Titanium 15:** A middle-aged woman of severe appearance, Titanium is the most deadly of all the warriors in the Crucible, having killed more of her opponents (by design or accident) than any other. While she has never won the Great Tourney, she's the top contender for this year.
- **The Young Master:** The Young Master appears to be not much more than a boy -- in his late teens or early twenties. But his eyes are cold, dead, and ancient. He smiles easily, and can be swayed with passion -- be it the defense of a lover or a fevered explanation of "illegal" events. He has a cool and kindly regard for his flock, but will not hesitate to kill one of them if it serves his hidden purposes. He never drinks alcohol, but serves it with a free hand.

Items & Locations

- **The Arena:** This large amphitheater not only hosts the Minor Tourneys and the yearly Great Tournament, but also serves as a town hall for the inhabitants of the Crucible.
- **The Beasts' Den:** The hall of the Beast warriors, constructed and furnished in dark woods and leather. Comfortably lived-in and cozy, it's also disorganized and messy.
- **The Bell:** A large brass bell, which marks the hours (and signals an alarm when villagers attempt to escape). In its shadow stands a small shrine, "To all that are (no longer) here," used by many dwellers as an all-purpose site of devotion. It is thought that the Fu Dogs make their lair in the caves below.
- **The Café:** Serving alcohol, tea, coffee, herbal mixtures, and light fare, the Café is a popular haunt of the more sociable Crucible dwellers. Grand debates on art, philosophy, sexuality, and religion sprout up regularly, often necessitating a withdrawal to the Forest, the Grove, the Koi Pond, or the Zen Garden, as appropriate (see below).
- **The Caves:** Numerous nooks and crannies hidden in the cliffs below the Bell and the Green Pagoda, believed to run below all of the Crucible. Also serves as the warren of the mysterious Fu Dogs. Some who enter never return.

alchemical elixir, to see what noble art will bubble forth. But who's running the laboratory: an ancient sorcerer? The Military? Aliens?

- *A Method of Recruitment:* It's a way to enlist henchmen for a mysterious (benevolent/malevolent) "Mr. Big."
- *A Prison:* Perhaps the Crucible serves to hold the world's best warriors captive, either in reserve for a coming threat, to protect a helpless populace, or to shield those in power from their awesome abilities.
- *A School/Training Center:* Maybe the Crucible is a simple temple of learning, dedicated to reaching the pinnacle of chi mastery. Or it could be a training ground for combat-model bioroids. Or both.
- *A Secret:* The world at large knows nothing of the Crucible.
- *Some Combination of the Above:* See the various *Spins* for some combinations.

- **The Emerald Pagoda:** The residence of the Young Master (and his major domo, Muskrat Zero), this elegant three-story pagoda is octagonal in shape. Its green hue comes from the oxidizing copper sheathing it. Few other villagers have ventured within, and none have ever seen more than the Young Master's office/library/tea room, which makes up the entire ground floor. It is thought that the lower levels of the Emerald Pagoda connect to the cave system of the Fu Dogs.
- **The Forest:** A thick tangle of pines and hardwoods, with wide paths under the boughs. Some areas are choked with brambles and undergrowth. The preferred spot for illegal fighting during the day.
- **General Store:** The basic necessities and luxuries of life are found here, within reason. Food, snacks, clothes, personal items and toiletries, hobby tools, books (but no newspapers or magazines), and the like are all available. It's obvious that not all of the goods for sale are produced at the farm across the lake, but no one is sure how the products arrive in the Crucible . . . except the Young Master.
- **The Grove:** This small stand of fruit trees is a fragrant rendezvous for lovers, especially those under the Young Master's interdict.
- **Harvest Hall:** The hall of the Harvesters, constructed and furnished in natural woods and wicker. Light, airy, and cool, it sways in high winds.
- **The Hospital:** A clean, well-constructed building of modern design, the Hospital provides a remarkable (some say miraculous) level of traditional, holistic care for the sick and injured, who recover with speed within its walls.
- **House of Ideals:** The hall of the Ideals, constructed and furnished bamboo, reeds, and sturdy paper. Serene and quiet, it can feel a little stark.
- **Koi Pond:** A shallow pond filled with decorative fish. Another popular spot for romantic assignations.
- **The Lake:** Filled with clean, cool, refreshing mountain water, the depth of the lake is unknown. There are rumors of submerged caverns that provide inflow and outflow of its waters.
- **The Metal's Forge:** The hall of the Metal warriors, constructed and furnished in metals and rough cloth. It's always very warm, but not cozy.
- **The Mountains:** While the ones pictured on the map are steep, they are climbable -- and then it will be discovered that they are but foothills to the titanic, impassable peaks that shelter the hidden valley.
- **Zen Garden:** A rock and sand garden, used for meditation and contemplation. A popular location for nighttime "illegal" melees.

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Austerity is a term (borrowed from the inestimable Ken Hite) that indicates how accountable characters are held for their actions. I'm expanding this for "Campaign in a Box" to include the basic "nature" of how characters interact with the setting. In a high-austerity game, the characters obey the physical and psychological laws of the Real World. In a low-austerity game, characters may be able to - or must -- violate some or all of these laws. GMs can adjust the austerity to their (and their players') tastes. The setting of austerity is a spectrum, so that a campaign can be set between Mild and Medium, for minor tweaks on the way things work. The textbox *OPTION: How Strong Is Your Kung Fu, Anyway?* has more discussion on austerity specific to this setting.

Kung-Fu Crucible Themes

- **Mastery:** Mastery of technique, self, and others is a common thread of the martial arts genre. Completing the phrase "a true master (blanks)" can lead to a number of plot ideas. (A true master is one with the universe; a true master never bows; a true master defeats his enemies without fighting; etc.)
- **Revenge:** Revenge upon another warrior -- for a slight (real or imagined) or the death of a family member, friend, or mentor -- is another trope of kung-fu stories. Perhaps an enemy of a PC (or all the PCs) has settled down in the Crucible, and the characters have come to make him pay.
- **Discovery:** The thrill of learning new and more powerful techniques is a strong element in martial arts tales. The Universal Parry, the Fist That

OPTION: How Strong Is Your Kung Fu, Anyway?

Examples of differing austerity levels in a Kung-Fu Crucible campaign follow. They are broken down by Chi (High Austerity), Chambara (Medium Austerity), and Woo-Woo-Wuxia (Low Austerity).

Jumping

Strikes From Afar, or the Silent Cobra may be required to defeat an otherwise invulnerable enemy out in the Real World.

- **Synthesis:** Related to both Mastery and Discovery, Synthesis is all about bringing together differing elements to make a new, stronger whole. Arguably, the entire point of the Crucible is to develop the Philosopher's Style, by integrating all chi disciplines . . . but why?
- **Paranoia:** An isolated location, strange traditions and strictures, mysterious Young Masters, giant Fu Dogs critters, weird chambara abilities . . . It's enough to give a guy the willies. Why does the Crucible exist? Why have I been brought here? What do they want from me? And how do I get out?

Events & Possible Spins

- **Alpha (Fe)Male:** One or more of the PCs become the leader(s) of their warriors hall -- whether by low name number, high name number, lot, or vote. Now they must deal with the strange dictates of the Young Master, keeping their hall-mates in line, training their people for combat, and distribution of the valuable chits. (May be appropriate as a mind-bending first session.)
- **Forced to Serve As Judge:** The Young Master informs a PC that he must referee a Bout . . . between two of his friends, with the strong implication that the loser will be punished harshly. But for what? And how? A sticky situation all around, since the other PCs may hold the referee PC responsible for their fate.
- **Out of Bounds:** One of the PCs falls in love or is seduced by an attractive warrior of a rival house. Unfortunately, the Young Master has recently forbidden relationships between members of the two halls. This may lead to romantic angst, assignations, duels, and deaths. (Quoth Mercury 5 to Rhodium 7 before that worthy meets the lovely Juniper 4: "If love be rough with you, be rough with love;/ Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down.")

Spins are combinations of options that riff off of the base setting presented in this Campaign in a Box. By adding different combinations of factors, one can generate wildly different variants of a Kung-Fu Crucible setting. Here follow some examples:

SPIN: The Humble Monastery of the Servants of the King

- *Austerity:* Chi.
- *Location:* High up on a mountain.
- *Entry:* Narrow passes, guarded by the monks.
- *Exit:* As above.
- *What is the Crucible?:* School (the training ground for the King's bodyguards).
- *Who is the Young Master?:* The King's bastard brother.
- *What is the Prize?:* Admission to the King's Men.

SPIN: You are Dragon 6 . . .

- *Austerity:* Chi to Chambara.

Chi: Standing high jump of body height.

Chambara: 20' to 50' vertical leaps.

Woo-Woo-Wuxia: "Flying" superleaps.

Light Walk

Chi: Can cross a squeaky floor with no noise.

Chambara: Can walk across taut rice paper.

Woo-Woo-Wuxia: Water-walking.

Mighty Attacks

Chi: Blurred strike that knocks opponent back or down.

Chambara: Distant blows that hit at distance; opponents knocked back more than a yard.

Woo-Woo-Wuxia: Energy blast punches; extensive collateral damage; opponents blown back tens of yards through scenery.

Pressure Points

Chi: Can cause pain/numbness through manipulating nerve clusters.

Chambara: Can "paralyze" opponents through sequence of pressure point strikes.

Woo-Woo-Wuxia: Can kill with pressure point utilization; the poison fist, the touch of death, or the quivering palm.

Location: In the Crucible.

- *Entry:* Abduction.
- *Exit:* There is no exit (or is there?) . . .
- *What is the Crucible?:* That would be telling . . . (Probably Prison/Experiment).
- *Who is the Young Master?:* I am the new Young Master.
- *What is the Prize?:* Information, information, information (on what the Crucible is, of course) . . .
- *Notes:* Obviously, this particular setting is ripe for themes of Paranoia and Discovery, and would work very well with a number of PC Invisible Judges, against either one of their own or the evasive Dragon 6. Perhaps Dragon 6 has been brought to the Crucible, so that the Young Master may study and learn from his unique mastery of the arts of combat. The PCs could be tasked to learn from him, gain his confidence, or prevent his escape attempts.

SPIN: Alien Footsoldiers

- *Austerity:* Chambara.
- *Location:* Within a spaceship.
- *Entry:* Teleportation beam kidnapping.
- *Exit:* Into the bio-converters or hard vacuum.
- *What is the Crucible?:* Training Center/Experiment (to develop soldiers and battle powers).
- *Who is the Young Master?:* A turncoat human, working for the Alien Overlords.
- *What is the Prize?:* All your dreams come true (actually, victors are inducted into the "Naked Chimp Assault Force").
- *Notes:* Martial artists have been captured on Earth to aid the Abductors in developing new and improved ways to slaughter their interstellar enemies. The Abductors wish to develop new chi powers for themselves by studying the Earthling adepts, as well as shape human weapons to aim at their foes.

SPIN: Dr. One's Tourney

- *Austerity:* Chambara to Woo-Woo-Wuxia.
- *Location:* A Pacific Island.
- *Entry:* Invitation to participate in Dr. One's Tourney.
- *Exit:* Can leave when competition is over, if they survive.
- *What is the Crucible?:* Athletic Tournament/Recruitment (plus secretly, Feeding)
- *Who is the Young Master?:* An eccentric millionaire (and supervillain).
- *What is the Prize?:* A prize purse of five million dollars (really, a chance to become one of Dr. One's lieutenants).
- *Notes:* Dr. One is a supervillain who requires the life force of others to fuel his powers. Chronically short of competent help, he's looking for someone to help whip his henchmen into shape. The competition is mostly legit, except that the victor is offered a position in Dr. One's organization. If he accepts, the runner-up is consumed. If he declines this honor, *he* is consumed, and Dr. One asks the runner-up to join . . .

SPIN: Ultimate Warrior Federation TV

- *Austerity:* Woo-Woo-Wuxia.
- *Location:* A secluded valley in the northern Rocky Mountains.
- *Entry:* Audition.
- *Exit:* Permanent Injury, End of Contract, Victory, or Death.
- *What is the Crucible?:* Entertainment (the most popular blood-sport on TV, baby!).
- *Who is the Young Master?:* Your humble host and emcee.
- *What is the Prize?:* The title belt, the adulation of fans everywhere, and that sweet, sweet sponsorship/licensing/advertisement money.

TOOL: The "Special Move" Naming Chart

Use the following charts to develop wild names for special martial arts attacks. Any special effects relating to Named Special Moves is something to be worked out between player, GM, and game system. Determine the level of desired Naming:

- **Evocative:** Roll on A **or** roll on (B, C, D, or E), plus a roll on (F or G) as appropriate.
- **Cool:** Roll on A **and** a roll on (B, C, D, or E), plus a roll on (F or G) as appropriate.
- **Totally Sweet:** Roll **twice** on A, plus a roll on (B, C, D, or E), plus a roll on (F or G) as appropriate.

Names may always have their elements rearranged for a better sounding Special Move. PCs may choose to replace the roll on (B, C, D, or E) with their own name, or may select a specific attack or defense from F or G (if they know what sort of technique they're naming).

Example A: Platinum 3 wants a generic evocative attack. She rolls on A (14) and F (3) to get a "Lightning Grip."

Example B: Flamingo 23 wants a totally sweet, personalized dodge. He rolls twice on A (9, 21), selects "Flamingo" (since it's his name) and "Dodge" from G (since that's what he wants). Thus, he gets a "Flamingo Spirit Flying Dodge."

Table A. Adjectives (4d6)

- 4 Celestial
- 5 Demon
- 6 Drunken
- 7 Energy
- 8 Explosive
- 9 Flying
- 10 Ghost
- 11 Happiness
- 12 Infernal
- 13 Invisible
- 14 Lightning
- 15 Lunar
- 16 Magic
- 17 Power
- 18 Shadow
- 19 Shaolin
- 20 Solar
- 21 Spirit
- 22 Storm
- 23 Super
- 24 Thunder

Table B. Animals (4d6)

- 4 Bear
- 5 Boar
- 6 Butterfly
- 7 Cat
- 8 Dog
- 9 Dragon
- 10 Eagle
- 11 Elephant
- 12 Grasshopper
- 13 Horse

- 14Lion
- 15Mantis
- 16Monkey
- 17Ox
- 18Ram
- 19Rhino
- 20Rooster
- 21Sparrow
- 22Tiger
- 23Unicorn
- 24Wolf

Table C. Plants (2d6)

- 2 Apple
- 3 Briar
- 4 Elm
- 5 Ivy
- 6 Lily
- 7 Oak
- 8 Peach
- 9 Quince
- 10Rose
- 11Rowan
- 12Seaweed/Kelp

Table D. Ideals (2d6)

- 2 Charity
- 3 Courage
- 4 Cunning
- 5 Faith
- 6 Grace
- 7 Hope
- 8 Justice
- 9 Love
- 10Prudence/Wisdom
- 11Purity
- 12Truth

Table E. Metals (3d6)

- 3 Brass
- 4 Bronze
- 5 Cobalt
- 6 Copper
- 7 Gold
- 8 Iridium
- 9 Iron
- 10Lead
- 11Mercury
- 12Nickel
- 13Platinum

- 14Silver
- 15Steel
- 16Titanium
- 17Tungsten
- 18Uranium

Table F. Attack Style (1d6)

- 1Attack
- 2Blow
- 3Grip
- 4Kick
- 5Strike
- 6Throw

Table G. Defense Style (1d6)

- 1Block
- 2Dodge
- 3Evade
- 4Parry
- 5Retreat
- 6Twist

Other Resources

- *Babylon 5*, "TKO" -- <http://www.midwinter.com/lurk/countries/us/guide/014.html>
- *The Bride With White Hair* -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0106342>
- *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (aka *Wo hu cang long*) -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0190332>
- *Dragonball Z* -- <http://www.dragonballz.com/>
- *Dragon Inn* (aka *Xin long men ke zhan*) -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0105859>
- *Enter the Dragon* -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0070034>
- *Feng Shui* -- http://www.atlas-games.com/fs_index.html
- *GURPS Martial Arts, 2nd Edition* -- <http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/MartialArts/>
- *Hong Kong Action Theater, 2nd Edition* -- <http://www.guardiansorder.com/greengoo/hkat.html>
- *Iron Monkey* (aka *Siunin Wong Fei-hung tsi titmalau*) -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0108148>
- *The Last Dragon* -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0089461>
- *The Legend* (aka *Fong Sai-Yuk*) -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0106936>
- *Lost Horizon* -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0029162>
- *The Matrix* -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0133093>
- *Mortal Kombat* -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0113855>
- *The Official Ninja Webpage* -- <http://www.realultimatepower.net/>
- *Once Upon A Time in China* (aka *Wong Fei-hung*) -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0103285>
- *The Prisoner* -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0061287>
- *The Running Man* -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0093894>
- *Star Trek*, "Gamesters of Triskelion" -- <http://www.scifi.com/startrek/episodes/46.html>

High Noon

GURPS Rules for the Classic Duel

by **Brian Rogers**

The hero faces off against the villain. Maybe one's a sheriff and the other's an outlaw, or they're a space captain and an enemy saboteur, or a maverick cop and a cold hearted killer. Maybe the expanse between them is a dusty street, or the catwalk of the warp drive, or a garbage strewn alley. That doesn't matter -- what matters is that all of the conflict between these two individuals has boiled down to this moment, where there is no other outcome than the drawing of weapons, the final shot. One wins, one dies.

It's a classic. It's the ultimate, one-bullet ending to a campaign. Born in the Western, it has migrated to other film genres and found them fertile soil. Unfortunately, it's also the only point where the phrase "cinematic combat" means "much more likely to kill you in an instant." So how do you include it in your game? It involves maintaining respect for the form, inserting some rules for "cleaner" violence and giving your players several rolls leading up to the climactic shot, so no one thinks that their character has just been killed by a single bad dice roll.

1: The Calling Out / The Final Conversation

It's customary for Duelists to engage one another before the final moments -- a combination of delaying the inevitable and sizing up the opposition. They may exchange one last set of insults, reveal the secrets of their master plan, reminisce about how things came to this pass or simply glare at one another. Regardless of what they say, they're weighing up and psyching out their opponent.

This is similar to a Contest of Wills (p. MA48), but one denying the loser the option of not fighting (once things have reached this stage, there's no turning back without facing the consequences discussed below under "The Form"). This is a contest of Will vs. Will, with the following modifiers. The better fighter gains +1 per 3 points his best combat skill exceeds his opponent's best combat skill. Add each character's Reputation to his effective Will (negative Reputation could help or hurt, depending on its nature). Making a successful Acting or Fast-Talk roll gives a +1 unless, opponent has Body Language, Detect Lies or Empathy. Alternately, making a successful Intimidate roll gives a +1, unless the target has base Fright Check of 15+ (counting bonuses from advantages like Combat Reflexes, Fearlessness, etc.).

Roll the contest until one opponent fails his roll (B87). The loser will suffer a -1 DX penalty for every point by which he lost the Contest of Wills during the course of the Duel. Losing the Contest of Wills means that the Duelist has had his nerve shaken or his mind distracted in this final exchange, costing him precious focus in the upcoming duel. This contest of wills is designed to stretch out the Duel, giving players and GMs alike an opportunity to make more rolls and accrue more of an edge before the bullets start flying.

2: The Form

The Duel is more than just a gunfight. It's the final gunfight, where both sides are willing to eschew things like cover, running, ambushes or other realistic stratagems that give one fighter an edge. In an ordinary gunfight, one side might be willing to escape, to run. For the participants in the Duel, there is no other way out except dealing or accepting a quick, almost bloodless death. So how do GMs make the Duelists accept those rules? Here are some options.

Fear: Once involved in the duel, Fright Checks are required to violate its rules. Fear of death is heightened, and the best action may be to use the rituals of the Duel to see it through without getting distracted by strategies. A successful Fright Check means that the Duelist's head is clear enough to try unconventional tactics. Failure means that fear has slowed the Duelist's thoughts, distracting him in the crucial early seconds of the Duel. The GM should consult the

Fright Check table with a +3 rather than +3d. The roll is meant to show a second's distraction or hesitation, not full bore panic. (Of course, inexperienced gunslingers forced into a Duel may panic, but that's a reaction to their situation, not trying to clearly weigh tactics in a tight spot.)

Cheaters Never Prosper: Since the forms of the Duel have become almost a ritual, it may be easier for combatants to see their opponents' intention to cheat. If one Duelist plans to break the rules, the other gets a +2 on any Tactics, Body Language, Empathy skill check to predict his cowardice. The GM might make this a Quick Contest against the cheater's Acting or Will to see how well he hides his intentions. If the intention to break the rules is detected, the honest Duelist gains +2 on any rolls that the GM determines would counter that cheating (i.e., the Fast Draw roll if the cheater intended to ignore any set signal to draw, to spot and dodge any bushwhacking confederates of the cheater, etc.). GMs taking this option for preserving the Duel can liberally apply these bonuses, making cheating in the Duel a losing proposition for anyone other than stone-faced killers who no gunfighter could predict.

Honor: Cultures with significant Dueling traditions see violating the unwritten rules as a quick path to a negative reputation or loss of status. This may be a minor consideration for blackguards, but for honorable characters, or ones worried about having the reputation of a coward, it's a serious threat. The GM can apply negative reputation ("Coward and Cheat") or status (due to loss of honor or face) as appropriate, based on the degree of infraction and the number of witnesses. A -1 to -5 point penalty is common. The negative reputation may be among a specific class (other gunfighters) or commonplace if the event is widely publicized. Even if no one sees the event, the cheater will receive a 1 point quirk, such as "shifty eyes," "suspiciously touchy about reputation," or "guilty expression" as a consequence of his actions.

Magic: Of course, in a game with deities, spirits, magic, psionics or high weirdness, there may well be other powers that would enforce the rules of the Duel through their own powers and for their own reasons.

3: The Stance

In a situation as split second as the Duel, everything matters. Minor variations of stance affect the draw speed, target selection and accuracy. Duelists can chose to face their opponents at a slight angle, head on, fully sideways or ready to assume a crouch during the draw.

Facing at a slight angle (primary hand slightly closer to the opponent) cuts down target area without sacrificing speed or accuracy. This equates to making a standard Attack, with the usual Dodge roll to avoid any incoming attacks. It gives no special benefits or advantages.

Facing head on means that the duelist is focusing entirely on his attack, giving no thought to making himself a smaller target or to moving out the way. This equates to the All-Out Attack maneuver (p. B105). While not normally allowed for Ranged Weapons, it is permissible in the confines of the Duel. Duelists use this if they're sure of their Fast Draw and want an edge in their attack -- after all, if they hit, their opponent probably won't be firing back, making defense irrelevant. Only the +4 to skill, +2 to damage, or 2 attacks (quick drawing a pistol with both hands) options apply in the Duel.

Facing on the side or crouching are defensive stances, designed to minimize target area. Duelists who think they may lose the draw take these, hoping that it will make their opponent miss and give them a chance to strike back. Either stance gives the standard -2 to be hit for Crouching (p. B118), but both also give a -2 on their Fast-Draw Initiative (see below).

4: The Draw

In circumstances where speed is everything, the usual *GURPS* initiative rules are simply too coarse -- neither the 1d roll or Movement comparison are quite appropriate when two opponents are trying to beat one another in an instantaneous action. Instead, the GM should determine initiative in the first round of the Duel by using the duelists' Fast-Draw rolls to draw their guns as a Quick Contest.

First, use the Fast Draw rolls to determine actual success or failure in drawing and readying the weapon, as usual. Then use those rolls in a Quick Contest to see who Fast-Drew faster, called the Fast Draw Initiative. Apply a -2 to the roll of any character in a crouch or side stance. Apply the initiative bonuses for the Tactics skill to the rolls as well. The winner of the Quick Contest acts first in the first round of the Duel. If the loser of the Quick Contest is still standing after the winner's action, he acts normally, and initiative proceeds as normal for the remainder of the Duel. It's very rare for the Duel to last past one round, but it can happen.

5: The Shot

Obviously, the goal in any gunfight is dropping the other guy as fast as possible. In the Duel, where so little attention is paid to defense, it's even more essential. Duelists do this by making called shots to maximize damage. The traditional target areas are the Brain, Eyes, Vitals and Hands (assuming the character is an ultimately law abiding type who really wants to bring his opponent in disarmed but alive). The GM might want to apply a -5 penalty rather than the standard -3 for shots to the Vitals against crouching or side-facing opponents, due to the shift in target area.

Unfortunately for the clean, stylized combat of the Duel, these penalties are quite high. This makes abandoning called shots for un-penalized attacks an attractive option, which leads to longer, bloodier, multi-hit battles, destroying the whole image of the Duel. To make these sorts of clean-kill shots more attractive, GM should halve the penalties (round up) for attacking specific body parts as part of the Duel, since neither side is concentrating much on defense. The new penalties under such a rule are:

Hand	-2
Vitals	-2
Vitals vs. side facing or crouching target	-3
Head	-4
Brain	-5

In most cases, the damage done by one attack in the Duel -- a TL 5 pistol is likely to do 2d of base damage, $\times 1.5$ or $\times 2$ for bullet size, $\times 3$ or $\times 4$ for target area, for a low average of 20+ and a high of 80+ points of damage -- will reduce the Victim to -HT in one shot. Again, to keep the stylized nature of the Duel intact, the GM may want to rule that anyone taking a massive amount of damage (greater than $\times 2$ HT) from one shot in a Duel should be declared dead. The GM can use the full rules for Shock, Knockout, Knockdown, Stun, and Death, but this may wreck the idiom if two very tough Duelists keep making their resistance rolls and fight on to bloody $-5 \times$ HT. If the GM isn't using the Instant Death option, shots to the Brain (with their automatic knockout option) become especially attractive.

Obviously, these rules don't simulate reality -- in real gunfights people don't line up, wait for the other guy to get ready and abandon dodging. But in the stylized world of Cinema, the Duel becomes the final conflict between good and evil, pitting skill against skill alone in a clean battle to the death, and it deserves to be recognized in gaming.

Factions

Buying Friends and Associates in *GURPS*

by Christopher Hammock

A faction is a new advantage for *GURPS*. It can be viewed as a cross between the Wealth advantage and an Ally Group. A faction provides its controlling character with paid, loyal employees or followers, and the equipment and facilities required for them to use their skills. Members of a faction are all considered to be normal 25 to 50 point characters. A faction is designed using a point system analagous to that used to create *GURPS* characters. To design a faction, the controlling player decides what point value he wants. The cost for the character is 10 character points plus one-half the value of the faction in faction points. The faction is then created by choosing attributes, advantages, disadvantages and skills. These describe the NPC hirelings and equipment that make up the faction.

Faction Attributes

As for a character, attributes are the fundamental description of a faction. Each attribute has a default value of 10. Higher or lower values may be taken for a point cost or bonus according to the table on p. B13. It is suggested that a cap be placed on the number of points spent on attributes. A reasonable value would be 100 points or the total point value of the faction, whichever is less. The four faction attributes are:

Manpower (MP): This governs the number of individuals in the faction, according to this table:

Level	Manpower
1	1 person
2	2 people
3	3 people
4	4 people
5	5 people
6	8 people
7	12 people
8	20 people
9	30 people
10	50 people
11	80 people
12	125 people
13	200 people
14	300 people
15	500 people
16	800 people
17	1250 people
18	2000 people
19	3000 people
20	5000 people

Should members of a faction be lost, replacements may be recruited and trained over time. The details of this must be determined by the GM.

Training (TR): This represents the faction's ability to perform skilled tasks. Expertise in specific areas is acquired by putting points into a particular skill. Physical skills are based upon this attribute.

Knowledge (KN): This attribute represents the knowledge base and world experience contained within the faction. This governs the scientific, technical, artistic and commercial activities of the faction. Expertise in specific areas is bought up as a specific skill. Mental skills are based upon this attribute.

Loyalty (LY): This represents the degree of commitment faction members feel for the faction and the leader. It is identical to the loyalty attribute for traditional hirelings (p. B195) except that it cannot increase spontaneously. The only way to increase Loyalty is to invest faction points in the attribute. Loyalty can drop spontaneously, lowering the point value of the faction and thus the point value of the character controlling the faction. This would normally only result from selfish actions on the part of the controlling character.

Faction Advantages and Disadvantages

Any advantage or disadvantage taken for a faction applies to all members of the faction, so normally only Social or Mental advantages and disadvantages are available. These will typically reflect the nature of the faction; for example, a religious faction may have Clerical Investment and a religious Intolerance. Most Physical, Racial, Occult and other advantages and disadvantages will be inappropriate unless the composition of the faction is very homogeneous. At the GM's discretion, any advantage that applies only to some specific faction members may be purchased for full price. Advantages that can be learned by an individual (like Literacy or Combat Reflexes) can also be acquired by a faction during play.

Any advantage or disadvantage taken by a faction has the same value in faction points as it would normally in character points. A faction should be limited to -40 points in disadvantages (or some other value if the GM prefers). A faction may also take up to 5 quirks at -1 point apiece.

One additional advantage for a faction is Facilities. This is a variable cost, "catch-all" advantage akin to an Unusual Background for a character. The GM may require the faction to purchase this to cover the cost of specialized equipment and real estate. For example, many Scientific Skills are of little use without a properly furnished laboratory. The GM can set the exact point cost for Facilities. Note that Facilities are only intended to cover special or big-ticket items. The base 10 character point cost for taking a faction covers all the basic goods and equipment that the faction would require.

Skills

Skills are the specific areas of expertise in which faction members are trained. All skills available to characters are available to factions. A player buys a skill for his character's faction by allotting faction points to that skill. The tables on p. B44 are used to determine the level that members of the faction will have with that skill. Physical skills are based on the faction's Training attribute and Mental skills are based on the Knowledge attribute.

Assembling and Using a Faction

Once attributes, advantages, disadvantages and skills have been purchased, the exact composition of the faction must be specified. In particular, skills must be assigned to specific hirelings within the faction. Bear in mind that the hirelings are still only 25-50 point normal characters, so each will only have a few skills. Most hirelings should only have one skill, particularly those that are highly specialized, such as Scientific and Artistic skills. Skills which complement one another -- such as Broadsword, Shield and Knife; or Stealth, Lockpicking and Climbing -- can be assigned together to create combat specialists or burglary specialists; however, such skill groupings should be authorized by the GM first. Regardless, no hireling should have more than three skills. Some members of the faction may have no skill assigned to them so that they may learn new skills acquired by the faction in the future.

It should also be noted that the Training and Knowledge attributes of the faction *do not* correspond to the Dexterity and IQ attributes of the faction members. If it becomes necessary to know the attributes of a hireling, assume they are all 10 except for the one on which his skill is based; assume that attribute is 12. If the hireling has both Mental and

Physical skills, assume that both Dexterity and IQ are 11. In the case of combat specialists, it may be assumed that Strength and Dexterity are both 11 (particularly for the purpose of figuring combat damage). Derived attributes such as Move and Hit Points are calculated normally.

The characteristics of a faction need not necessarily be reflected in the character who controls it. For example, if the members of a faction all adhere to a specific Code of Honor, the character needn't also have that Code of Honor as a disadvantage. However, the character should respect that Code before his followers (or at the very least pretend to), otherwise he may lose their favor.

So now that you've created a faction, what exactly do you have? A collection of loyal NPC employees, followers, or disciples who have skills that they can use to assist you. They may also have whatever equipment and facilities are required for them to exercise their skills. The character points that you have invested in your faction have bought their loyalty (much like the Ally Group advantage does) and their equipment, training and upkeep costs (much like the Wealth advantage).

The faction can be improved during play simply by investing more character points in it. From the cost formula, each additional character point added increases the faction's value by 2 faction points. As an optional rule, the GM may require that a faction be improved only at half efficiency (as character attributes are) to prevent rapid inflation. As another optional rule, the GM may allow a player to shuffle faction points around mid-game, such as moving points from one skill into another (firing some employees to hire others) or one attribute to another -- for example, cutting employee benefits (Loyalty) to hire more employees (Manpower). If allowed, this also should occur at half efficiency (for every point removed from one location only a half-point may be added elsewhere).

Here is an example faction to help illustrate:

Lorn Bullhelm's Highlander Mercenaries (80 points)

Manpower: 8, 20 people [-15]

Training: 13 [+30]

Knowledge: 12 [+20]

Loyalty: 12 [+20]

Facilities: Inn [+5]

Warrior's Code of Honor [-10]

Always wear clan tartan kilts in combat [-1]

Axe/Mace (PA): 14 [+4]

Shield (PE): 15 [+4]

Crossbow (PE): 15 [+4]

Fast-Draw, bolt (PE): 13 [+1]

Survival, forest (MA): 12 [+2]

Cooking (ME): 13 [+2]

Beverage Making (ME): 14 [+4]

Professional Skill, Inn Management (MA): 14 [+6]

Professional Skill, Chambermaid (ME): 13 [+2]

Professional Skill, Waiting Tables (ME): 13 [+2]

Lorn Bullhelm is a mercenary leader from the barbarian highlands of any medieval setting. All his followers are from his clan and share the peculiarities of that clan. There is a fierce warrior ethic that even the non-combatants share. Like all clans in the highlands, Lorn and his people will only wear a kilt in his clan's tartan. They will wear other clothes, but in combat they will only wear this kilt (with armor, of course).

Lorn is a successful mercenary captain. He has managed to amass a small squad of 14 men: 3 crossbowmen (Crossbow, Fast-Draw, Survival) and 11 axemen (Axe/Mace, Shield, Survival). He has earned enough to set up an inn

in his home village, which lies across an important trading route and so sees a great deal of traffic. The inn is staffed by 6 people: the manager (Inn Management, Beverage Making), the cook (Cooking) and four young women who serve tables and prepare bedrooms (Waiting Tables, Chambermaid). The inn provides a steady income for Lorn as well as a convenient place for he and his men to stay when they are home. This 80 point faction costs Lorn 50 character points.

Faction Games

These rules can also be used so that the faction, and not the character, becomes the primary play entity. In this case, each player still has a character, but that character needn't be drawn up in the *GURPS* model. Instead, each player is given a certain number of points with which to build the faction that their character leads. Because the factions rules needn't be calibrated to fit within the *GURPS* system, game play may be modified in many ways for such a game.

Attributes

The GM may wish to slide the Manpower scale up or down, depending on what sort of game he wishes to have. For example, in a military game the GM may decide that MP:10 is 200 individuals, and adjust other Manpower levels accordingly. Or, in an espionage campaign, the GM may slide the scale downwards so the players will have fewer agents working for them.

Advantages

Several additional advantages are available that only operate properly under a factions game:

Covert

10 points

Very little is publically known about your faction. The location of your base(s) is not common knowledge, nor is anything about your faction's goals, agendas, or policies. Another faction that wants information regarding you will have to use Diplomacy, Streetwise, or some other skill, possibly at a penalty. Information regarding you will not be available through the Area Knowledge skill (unless you really screw up).

Expertise

variable

Your player character is an expert in some field represented by a skill. Whenever your character is personally involved in the exercise of that skill, you get a +1 bonus on the skill roll. An Expertise costs one-half the cost to raise the skill it modifies from (attr.+1) to (attr.+2). There is no limit to the number of Expertises your character can have, but your character can only work on one project at a time. There is also the risk of injury or death to your character if he gets directly involved in dangerous activities (however, see "Lieutenant" below).

Lieutenant

variable

You have an officer whom your underlings admire and respect; this officer counts towards the Manpower tally of the faction. The character must be given a name and a story. Whenever you send him to lead a mission or carry out an action, others will take it more seriously. A Lieutenant can provide a +1 to a specific skill whenever he is involved in its execution. Each Lieutenant can only have one such skill, however, and the skill must be chosen when the Lieutenant begins play. There is no limit to the number of Lieutenants a faction may have other than that set by the GM. Lieutenants may be acquired after play has begun. A Lieutenant costs 1 point plus one-half the cost to raise the skill he modifies (if any) from (attr.+1) to (attr.+2). If a Lieutenant is killed or lost, the points invested in him are also lost.

Reputation

1, 3, or 5 points/level

This is identical to the Reputation advantage in *GURPS* and represents how renowned (for better or possibly for worse) the faction, its leader and his representatives are within society. This advantage is purchased in increments. The size of the increment is determined by the size of the affected group. The 5 point increment is for all people; 3 points is for a large group; 1 point is for a small group. For every increment purchased, the affected group will react to your faction at +1. A faction can also take a negative Reputation (invoking a Reaction penalty) as a disadvantage.

Status

5 points/level

This is identical to the Status advantage in *GURPS* and represents the social standing of the faction, its leader and his representatives. It determines who will defer to whom and may affect how well people will react to a faction. (See p. B18 and p. B191 for more details.) Among other things, your level of Status determines the quality and luxury of the real estate (buildings and property) that your faction possesses and occupies (as opposed to Facilities, which determines their function), the quality of the material your uniforms are made of, the quality of the cafeteria food, etc.

Wealth

10 points/level

This represents the amount of liquid cashflow controlled by your faction. It is available in increments of 10 points per level (example: Wealth:3 would cost 30 points) until Wealth:5 and then 25 points per level after that. Normally, there is no running tally kept of a faction's holdings and assets. These are all assumed to be represented by the points a faction has invested in its attributes, advantages and skills. The Wealth advantage simply quantifies the liquid cash flow that the faction has on top of its fixed assets.

Your faction can use this cash to further its activities. Every level of Wealth allows a temporary +1 skill bonus to be applied to a single activity the faction is currently undertaking. For example, a faction with Wealth:3 could add +1 to its Forensics skill to investigate a crime scene and +2 to its Diplomacy skill for a negotiation that crops up shortly afterwards. However, until either the investigation or the negotiation ends, no new activity that begins can be given a skill bonus.

If the faction requires the use of a skill that it does not possess, appropriate workers can be hired temporarily using Wealth. Treat the first level of Wealth assigned to it as 1 point in the skill (using the attributes of the faction). Every subsequent level of Wealth adds the usual +1 bonus.

The GM may disallow any use of Wealth that he feels is abusive or unrealistic.

Skills

Skills are purchased for the faction and assigned to hirelings as normal. The GM may allow up to five or six skills to be assigned to each hireling in this type of game, since the hirelings are now the focus of the game and not the player character.

Assembling and Using a Faction

Activities of factions are carried out as tasks assigned by the character to his underlings. These tasks are resolved using attribute checks, skill checks, skill contests, reaction rolls and the GM's judgement just as under the conventional *GURPS* rules. The amount of activity that can be carried out is technically only limited by Manpower, although trying to do too much may just make life difficult for the player and the GM.

When you want to do something, simply tell the GM that you are dispatching one or more of your people to perform a

certain task. It is important that the exact composition of the party be specified. You may deliberately mix the group (for example if you want a stealthy party to sneak one of your geneticists into a lab to study the equipment there). The resolution of feats and conflicts is carried out on a broad level. In traditional **GURPS** play, a die roll is used to describe every swing of the sword and every silent step taken. On the scale of faction play, activities must be resolved on a larger scale. For example, the GM may roll against the a party's Lockpicking skill and Stealth skill simultaneously to determine if they successfully break into a building. Combat must also be abstracted; the **GURPS** mass combat rules may be used for this purpose (p.CIII12).

Unless you, the PC, accompany a party on its mission, you *won't* get a play-by-play of the action unless and until someone returns to tell the tale. If your party is ambushed and killed ten minutes after they leave, *you* will never know it. You can give the party instructions on how they should handle unexpected situations. Otherwise, the GM will improvise their reaction and resolve the situation accordingly.

These rules work particularly well as a play-by-e-mail game. This allows the GM to take time to resolve players' actions and to determine the responses of NPCs. It also allows multiple players to play in the same game and interact through the GM without even realizing it. This can add a great deal of excitement as players try to guess which other factions in the game are NPC factions and which belong to their friends.

Pyramid Review

Threats 2 (for Shadowrun)

Published by [FanPro](#)

Written by **Randall Bills, Rob Boyle, Elisa Carey, Davidson Cole, Dan "Flake" Grendell, Steve Kenson, Jason Levine, Michelle Lyons, Ken Peters, Jon Szeto, Jakko Westerbeke, Steve Kenson, Mike Yates**

Illustrated by **Marc Sasso, Peter Bergting, Joel Biske, Marko Djurdjevic, Larry MacDougall, Jim Nelson, Moses Neurosis, Matt Plog, Steve Prescott, Charles Rouse, Loston Wallace**

120-page perfect bound softcover; \$18

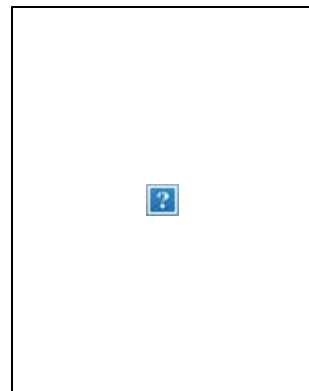
Threats 2 continues the exploration of *Shadowrun*'s Sixth World in the wake of Halley's Comet visitation, as begun in last year's *Year of the Comet*. The latest supplement from FanPro for *Shadowrun*, the mid-twenty-first century set RPG of magic and cyber-technology, elves and orks, mega-corporations and shadow-runners, presents twelve new protagonists for the GM to throw his players at or get them mixed up in. The contents of *Threats 2* looks at various aspects of the continuing meta-plot within the *Shadowrun* setting, which means that the referee is going to need more than a few previously published supplements to get the most out of this book. They include *The Shadowrun Companion*, *Magic in the Shadowlands*, *Year of the Comet*, *Target: Awakened Lands*, *Man & Machine*, *Target: Matrix* and *Matrix*. That is a lot of necessary supplements, but really, *Threats 2* is not intended as a book for the *Shadowrun* neophyte.

As with previous *Shadowrun* books, the format for *Threats 2* is that of a series of reports and documents posted to the Shadowland archive by its sysop, Captain Chaos, some three months after Halley's Comet has left. They are regularly interrupted by comments, questions and possible answers from an array of those who run the shadows . . . The layout is somewhat plain, only occasionally broken up by a piece of art. Each of the twelve entries ends with a section of relevant game information, with which the GM can work the particular menace into their game. This can take a little bit of effort, as the information is not given out on a plate, but *Shadowrun* GMs should be used to this by now. This section often contains references to the other titles in the *Shadowrun* line, as listed above.

And so to the twelve entries . . . As your typical shadow runner might say, "If you're a player, then this data ain't for you chummer. Go get a cup of soykaf."

[SPOILER ALERT!]

We open with Jason Levine's "General Saito," the transcript of a press conference given by Protectorate General Saito. When the Japanese Imperial marines were recalled to aid in the disaster relief at home -- as a result of the "Ring of Fire," or all of the Pacific Rim volcanoes erupting -- one Colonel Saito decided to stay in San Francisco and fill the power vacuum there. The commentary upon the transcript grabs the attention more than the transcript itself, as it hints at Saito's pro-human backers. Of all the entries in *Threats 2*, this is the least interesting and really gives little in the way of useful game information.



Both "Dissonant Voices" by Michelle Lyons and Jason Levine's "The Network" look at the aftermath of the Brainscan campaign. This detailed how an artificial intelligence known as Deus took over the Renraku Arcology, and eventually how it was defeated. In "Dissonant Voices," the A.I.'s former otaku lieutenant (named Pax) is still working to hack and physically rework the matrix in an effort to increase the presence of the entity, Dissonance. "The Network" hints at somebody using various individuals as a widespread processing network when they are online at the same time. Curiously, evidence suggests that whoever is directing this human processor is prone to contrary decisions.

The first of this supplement's magical threats is "Imps" by Elisa Carey. Something seems to be affecting users or researchers of spell foci or telesma. The problem is literally down to Imps, a newly appeared type of free spirit that likes to inhabit spell foci. Relatively weak, they can be quite benign and helpful, little tricksters, or worse. This threat is more quirky than nasty, depending upon how the GM uses them, but still quite fun to inflict upon the players with magic-using characters.

Those characters who were former mages or adepts, but have now burn out, may be interested in "The Aleph Society" by Ken Peters. Still quite a small fraternal order, it claims to have predicted many of the events surrounding the return of Halley's Comet. This is quite common among the various cults of 2061 and 2062, but the society's major claim is that it can restore the magical talent of those who have lost it. Of course, you have to be an initiate before you can gain such a benefit, and who knows what the Aleph Society's *real* secrets are?

Things take a gruesome turn in Davidson Cole's "Can You See The Real Me?" as Detroit's top assassin relates a job that came back to haunt her from the dead. People coming back from the dead were detailed in the *Year of the Comet*, known as the Shedim -- they had first appeared in the Middle East -- this new type seems more capable to the point where they can adapt to living in ordinary society. This type of menace is always fun to drop on the players . . . everyone loves zombies, don't they? Even more whacked out is "Betrayal" by Jakko Westerbeke, as it is discovered that the one corporation whose publicly stated stance is to destroy any manifestation of insect spirits it can, just happens to holding several and using them in a range of weird experimentations to create better guard critters. This entry is not a little reminiscent of the corporation from the *Alien* series of films.

"One Nation Under God" by Jon Szeto could be the mad ravings of CIA agent gone rogue, who imagines a conspiracy that reaches across all nations of North America and into their militaries, judiciaries, administrations, and media with one goal in mind: the restoration of the United States of America and a return to its former superpower status. This could take a long time to rout out and form the basis of a whole campaign, as could the "Those Who Have the Gold . . ." by Randall Bills and Mike Yates. This details what happens when a disgruntled former employee of the Fuchi Corporation finds a means to act upon his betrayal with a bequest from the dragon Dunkelzahn's will: the sum of thirty billion UCAS dollars! Intent upon enacting revenge upon his former boss, he has been making practice runs in taking down whole corporations, each larger then the first, with the Miami based Gunderson Corporation now a shell of its former self. Both of these threats are probably the most mundane in the *Threats 2*, but "Those Who Have the Gold . . ." is quite possibly the best.

Written by Dan "Flake" Grendell, "Order of the Temple" is the Sixth World's take upon the Knights Templar, restored by the Papal States, though now operating behind a veil of secrecy to spread the influence and power of Roman Catholicism. Another secret society hides behind an Iroquois semi-secret society of healers in "Behind the False Hope," by Ken Peters and Rob Boyle. Instead of healing like the False Face Society, the Crying Masks are very proactive in the destruction of bio- and cyber-technology used to enhance the human body -- not just the manufacturers, but in some cases items already installed! Both societies use constructed masks as their spell foci -- hence the names. Finally, Steve Kenson's "Dealing with Dragons" hints at a new effect of SURGE, or Sudden Recessive Genetic Expression, which is a variant of UGE (Unexplained Genetic Expression) detailed in *Year of the Comet*. The appearance of the Drake could be a whole new meta-human species or something else, but certainly the dragons of the Sixth World are very interested in those effected.

[SPOILER ALERT ENDS]

Whether the players in your group like running the matrix, surfing astral space, or plain running the shadows, *Threats 2* does what it sets out to do -- present a series of menaces and conspiracies that the players can become involved in.

There is something here for just about every aspect of the Sixth World, and they come in nice mix of sizes. Some of these deserve further coverage, such as "Those Who Have the Gold . . .," but will be interesting to see which of them do, indicating whether or not they are more than just "drek." In the meantime, *Shadowrun* GMs are free to pick and chose what they want from this sourcebook.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Pick

Playing with Pyramids: 12 Games for Icehouse Pieces



Published by [Looney Labs](#)

Written by Andrew Looney, John Cooper, Kory Heath,
Jacob Davenport, and Kristin Looney

128 black and white pages; \$12.00

Playing with Pyramids is the latest chapter in the long history of *Icehouse*, a game as well as a set of pyramid playing pieces from Looney Labs. My first [review](#) covered a product called the *Martian Chess Set* that contained 60 pyramids and the rules for four games. Looney Labs has discontinued that box. Today, they produce the plastic, stackable pyramids in 9 colors and sell them in tubes of 15, known as a "stash." An on-line community of game developers has produced numerous abstract strategy games that utilize them. This book collects twelve of these games.

Playing with Pyramids is by far one of the most impressive gaming documents I have ever read. Even if you have seen the rules on-line (see the "Sortable List of *Icehouse's* Cool Kindred" at <http://www.the-radix.com/0003.php>) the book provides updated and rewritten text as well as strategy tips. If you have little interest in abstract strategy games, this book is still an excellent example of organization, clarity, and flavor that can help anyone interested in writing rules for their own games.

The twelve games span a variety of types of play. The simpler games focus on fun rather than deep thinking. IceTowers is a turnless game of stacking pyramids and controlling towers where speed is only sometimes necessary. Thin Ice is an amusing party game where players compete to build the tallest tower. Martian Backgammon is similar to its namesake but uses stacking to add a twist to movement.

Other games require a bit more thought. Volcano is a puzzle game on a five-by-five grid where players compete to clear pyramids off the board. In Martian Chess, each player controls one fourth of a chessboard as well as any pieces in that quadrant. Capturing pieces also means giving up control of the attacking piece. Pikemen is another Chess-like game where pieces have two states, attacking and defending, which control whether or not they can capture or be captured. Zagami is a piece-taking game where the pyramids you acquire directly affect the actions available during your turn. Homeworlds is a boardless board game of space combat where players are randomly assigned the rolls of good or evil. An evil player wins by destroying all of one player's ships at her home planet. Good players share a win if they eliminate all the evil players.

Four of the games stand out as both innovative and fun. RAMbots is a bit like *RoboRally* played on a chessboard. Each player has a robot that must touch four beacons in a specific order to win. Before a turn, players secretly program five moves for their robots. During execution, the commands all have different priorities. Thus, a player with several high-priority commands may take multiple actions in a row, even before the other players move. High-priority commands accomplish less than low-priority moves, so players must balance moving quickly with moving far. Because robots can push the beacons and each other, the board is constantly in flux.

Gnostica is a board game where the field is made up of Tarot cards. Each player has a set of pyramids that move and attack using cards played from players' hands or by activating cards on the board. Every card is worth points, and the player that controls the most points wins. Gnostica is a game of efficiency, not only in play, but also in its rules. The challenge in playing Gnostica is to use every turn to its fullest. The joy of reading Gnostica is how the text accomplishes so much with so few words. Although not overly complex, the Gnostica rules cover many possibilities, not through exceptions, but rather through carefully constructed sentences.

Icehouse is the original game for the pyramids. Played without turns but with a time limit, three to five players place pyramids either upright as defenders or lying down as attackers. When time runs out, the player with the largest number of successful attackers and defenders wins. Typically, pyramids on the table can not move. However, if too many attacking pyramids gang up on a defender, the defender's owner may rearrange the attackers, possibly spoiling the attack. Icehouse is a game of dexterity and quick thinking that is not easily mastered.

The piece de resistance of *Playing with Pyramids* is Zendo. In it, a "master" creates two small groups of pyramids called "koans," one that has the "Buddha Nature" and one that does not. The "Buddha Nature" is a rule, such as "A Koan has the Buddha Nature if it contains exactly one red pyramid," or "A Koan has the Buddha Nature if it contains a stack of at least three pyramids." The rest of the players, or "students," must build their own koans in an effort to guess the master's rule. Addictive and thought provoking, Zendo will have you pondering rules long after the game is over.

Playing with Pyramids is more than a collection of great games. It is also an excellent presentation of those games. The book's organization makes it easy to find games appropriate to your group, the writing is concise and clear, and the art and photos illustrate the culture that has grown up around the pyramids.

The book groups the twelve games into categories such as "Games that use a Chessboard" and "Abstract Games of Serious Strategy." A chart at the beginning of the book describes the vital statistics of each game, such as the number of players and additional materials required. The Introduction provides a brief summary of each game. All of this allows readers to quickly identify which games interest them most.

The text of each game should be a primer for anyone interested in writing game rules. Each entry features understandable text, economic word use, and useful examples. Clearly, the authors took great effort to rewrite and edit their words. A short section on strategy appears at the end of each game. This adds value to the book for readers already familiar with the games. It also works as an interesting double-check to see if you understand the rules. If the strategy section does not make sense, then you may have missed something in the text.

Finally, *Playing with Pyramids* does a nice job of displaying the culture that surrounds *Icehouse*. The authors refer to the *Icehouse* pieces as "a System for Inventing Games" because so many people have been inspired to create games for them. The community has a strong on-line presence and an active e-mail list (accessed at <http://www.looneylabs.com>) that provided the playtesting, suggestions, and discussions that helped the games develop. The book contains some nice photographs of the games at conventions as well as pictures and a quick biography of each of the authors. Readers get a sense that there is a lot going on in the world of *Icehouse*.

Playing with Pyramids succeeds impressively at two things: It contains 12 great abstract strategy games and presents them in a manner that shows both skill and great care.

--Brad Weier

Pyramid Review

Star Trek Roleplaying Game Narrator's Guide

Published by [Decipher Roleplaying and Miniatures Studio](#)

Written by **Matthew Colville, Kenneth Hite, Ross A. Isaacs, Steven S. Long, Don Mappin, Christian Moore, and Owen Seyler**

Edited by **Ross A. Isaacs**

Graphic Design by **George Vasilakos**

Cover Design by **Michel Vrana, Dan Burns**

256 page full-color hardback; \$29.95

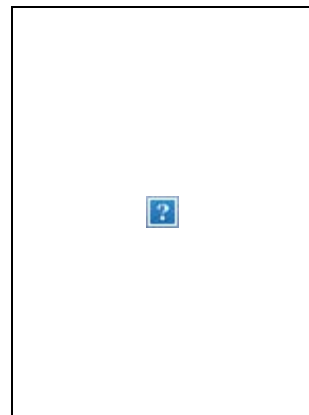
Star Trek just keeps coming back in one form or another. Decipher has released the second half of its core Coda System, the *Star Trek Narrator's Guide*. Together with the *Player's Guide*, it places the entire *Star Trek* universe in easy reach. Although there is some repetition between the books -- most notably the Coda System itself -- the two are carefully (and successfully) crafted to complement one another.

The book is broken up into three sections: Series Creation, Playing the Game, and Narrator Resources. The first, Series Creation, gives the Narrator advice on what to do before he and his players ever sit down to the table. The entire book treats the game as though players were creating their own TV series. Not only does this link the game and the franchise in the players' heads, it makes it easier to break the advice down.

The chapters in this section take the process step by step. Where and when is the series set? Who or what are the major players, the dominant species, the affected sectors? What will and won't be allowed? How do you change the focus of the show from season to season? How are they linked? Though the *Trek* setting has pretty wide vistas, players will bring a lot of expectations about races, professions, and settings to the table, and with the *Narrator's Guide* you should be able to build a sandbox big enough for the most diverse of crews. The book could serve as the bible for creating the next *Trek* series, never mind a roleplaying game.

The second section, Playing the Game, is the meat and potatoes of getting the action off the ground and out among the stars. The Coda System, first seen in the *Player's Guide*, is repeated here in a tidier format, putting all the rules for skill tests, reactions, and combat into one easy chapter. Narrators learn how to make game play a smoother and more meaningful experience (you know, the GMing advice), and this section builds on the first, breaking series into episodes, episodes into scenes, and scenes into dramatic conflicts. Rigorously detailed, even veteran gamers will take something with them (and how can you not love a section with information on "Things to Smell"?).

Another kind of fighting, starship combat, gets the treatment as well. Starship combat not only mirrors tactical combat but also adds maneuvers to the mix. Each ship gets two actions just like a character (although PCs inside the ship can busy themselves giving medical aid to other crewmembers or performing repairs on their craft). Once distance and initiative are determined, a commander can spend his ship's actions on three tiers of maneuvers. To perform the stunts from the higher tiers, you have to have made judicious use of one of the lower level maneuvers. If you want to do a



Cochrane Deceleration (a third tier maneuver), you have to have performed a Come About (first tier) and Match Speed (second tier) maneuver. Maneuvers determine your primary targets (and who's coming after you), how hard it will be for you to hit them, what range you're attacking from, and what tactics you can use against them. A set of tracks for each ship in the battle graphically represents who is targeting whom and how many "spaces" of track remain (you may slide along the track to close with your target while a third ship closes with you).

Damage and repair are simple -- you or your teammates use their skills with those systems -- and the effects of different systems are so well interconnected they simply scream *Star Trek*. You get no fewer than four kinds of emergency repairs, not including the option of classic moves like "transferring power to the shields." Even when not in the thick of combat, ships are in mortal danger from space borne phenomena, and you can use all the nifty chestnuts from the show like transporting characters at near-warp speed and remodulating the shields. Should your players survive the experience, the section will show you how to reward them for a job well done.

The last section, Narrator Resources, paints a backdrop against which the game can take place. An easy system for creating the starships you blew up in the last section -- along with several standard ships from the different series -- gets the group into the final frontier. Once there, a chapter on space (equal parts real science and the rubbery stuff that endangers the heroes every week) brings the cosmos to life. Some of that life includes the Andorians, Romulans, and Orions, each getting their own template, and an extensive chapter on creatures that, for reasons that pass all understanding, contains not one single creature.

The race selection may be sparse and the creatures nonexistent, but balancing their use in the game is no problem. Just as players use "picks" when creating their characters, NPCs and creatures are built with their own picks so they're balanced for the campaign. There's advice on including either of these as major threats, minor inconveniences, or just flavor text.

A small selection of popular characters is translated from the big and little screens into game terms, for use as participants in the game or templates that can be tweaked to fit whatever role the Narrator needs to fill in his story. And at the back of the book are . . . forms galore. There are forms for setting out the boundaries for a new series, for keeping track of scenes, creatures, ships, and bases, and for the captain's log. The sheets make less use of color, possibly to make photocopying easier, but considering all the charts and tables found throughout the starship operations and creation sections alone, you'd think the forms could be a little more comprehensive. A section marked "tactical data" is meant to hold the ship's shields and weapons, for example, but it amounts to little more than a small chunk of graph paper -- bigger than most fields, fortunately, but so much information just doesn't have a spot expansive enough to make up for the lack of a track of some kind.

The editing seems to get worse as the book proceeds, and the graphic design isn't nearly as good as that of the *Player's Guide*. There seems to be more text here, which squishes the still shots from the movies and TV series down and makes them look grainy and dark, leaving a lot less to look at. Looking beyond some of these flaws, though, the *Star Trek Narrator's Guide* is a good book, a good buy, and, combined with the *Player's Guide*, a good way to get the *Enterprise* and its offspring back onto the game store shelves where they belong.

--Andy Vetromile

Normalcy, And Other Fictional Constructs

Okay; this week we're on part two of our 920-part magnum opus (Latin for "penguin with gun") about character power levels.

Last week we covered the "Men among Gods" option, where the PCs have power levels that are vastly below the average for the world . . . or, at least, below the average for the focus of such a world.

This week we're discussing the "Normal" power level, where the characters are human. This option has some compelling possibilities; after all, many of us are, or have been, human at some point.

Unfortunately, from a game standpoint, there's one difficulty in choosing the "Normal" power level: there ain't no such thing.

Well, not easily definable. After all, ours is a world of jet-setting multi-billionaires and supermodels and marines and political leaders coexisting with One-Eyed Muttering Guy Who Smells Vaguely of Fish. While a significant minority postulate that supermodels are actually alien Greys sent as scouts for their inscrutable missions, most genetic testing proves they are, indeed, human. So when deciding on a "human" campaign level, how do you make sure everyone is on the same page regarding what is (and isn't) possible? How do you keep one player from having visions of creating Chuck Carnáge¹, ex-marine nuclear scientist millionaire, while another envisions playing Ted, the guy who operates the shake machine at Burger Hut?

Well, there are a few ways to handle this.

First, you might use a point-based system. This should keep people from making billionaire ex-astronaut ninjas, unless they're also willing to make them alcoholic pyromaniacal limbless amnesiac billionaire ex-astronaut ninjas that are wanted by 200 different heavily armed paramilitary groups. Even then, the GM would be within rights to say this somewhat stretches the bounds of "normal."

Second, you might use random character creation instead. Although I'm not random character generation's biggest fan by any stretch, I recognize it has its place; ideally, I think it shines when you're trying to create a world where characters *aren't* assured of being on equal power levels. Though this doesn't seem to work so well at medium-to-high skill levels (if everyone in a group goes through police or CIA training, for example, hopefully the group is roughly similar in abilities), it *does* work well at, ironically, the highest power levels, and the "normal" power levels. It works at the highest levels because in most genres that *do* have powerful characters, some characters are generally more powerful than others. ("I can fly, pick up trains, and burn things with my eyes!" "I can talk to fish!") It works at lower levels because there *is* so much variance among "normal" people.

Random character creation can generally be done in two different ways. First is where abilities are determined randomly (or near-randomly); attributes might be rolled individually, for example, and skills may be determined by rolling and determining what the character got from a list of skills. Depending on the system, these can create unsatisfying results. ("You're a carpenter with skills in pottery, astronomy, and heavy weapons fire.") (Although not Normal-power-level, the 1980s *Marvel Super Heroes RPG* -- especially with the *Ultimate Powers Book* -- excelled at generating characters that resulted in much head-scratching. "Why does my robot character have plant growth, zombie animation, prehensile hair, and Typical cosmic awareness?") On the other hand, many players -- like myself -- take a masochistic delight in trying to make the bizarre combinations make sense.

How powerful do you like your characters to be in RPGs you play in, compared to the rest of the populace?	
Gods among men! I like really powerful characters. (Four-Colored Supers, High Magic, <i>In Nomine</i>)	2%
Powerful! I like characters with abilities far different from normal people. (<i>Vampire</i> , <i>Mage</i> , Jedi)	8%
Highly competent! I like characters that are still human, but incredibly skilled. (Batman, James Bond, <i>Black Ops</i>)	13%
Competent! I like characters that are human, but still more skilled than normal folks. (<i>X-Files</i> , <i>Dungeons & Dragons</i> , <i>Call of Cthulhu</i>)	33%
Normal! I like my characters human. (some <i>Traveller</i> games)	4%
Men among gods! I like playing weak characters among very strong forces. (<i>Bunnies & Burrows</i>)	0%
It depends. I like playing lots of different power levels.	36%
Dude! I don't roleplay!	0%

In a game with a character point system, things are a bit easier; you can generally simulate the variation in humanity by making the number of points each player starts with random. For example, in a *GURPS* each player may get d100 - 25 character points . . . or, for more variation *and* an actual "bell curve", 2d100 - 50 character points.

Given how much random generation systems can divide a gaming group, it's probably best to make sure everyone is willing to use a random system ahead of time.

The third option for handing the variation of "normal" humans is simply to forget it. Have each player create a "human" character, using whatever definition of human they'd like . . . no point limits, nothing else. Oh, and mention that you'll create each player's challenges based on how powerful a character they create. I can't speak for all groups of players, but the three times I've done this, it's worked splendidly. The players who *did* create more powerful characters generally liked the challenge, and almost universally all players had strong, compelling, and realistic backgrounds and motivations for their characters.

Okay; so by hook or by crook you've acquired a group of human characters. Now what?

Well, let's back up a bit. *Why* would you want to play normal folks in the first place?

Well, for one thing, it's an interesting challenge. Sure, a rich and powerful senator who teams up with a Nobel Laureate scientist and a Navy SEAL who's spent 10 years training his body to the peak of perfection *should* have a fair shot of thwarting some Cthulhuian horror intent on entering our realm . . . that's why we *have* the Nobel Prizes, after all. But what about the sixty-year-old security guard, the high school dropout, and the Baptist minister who are tangled up in a dangerous game of cat and mouse (or whatever other exciting movie-trailer-type tag line you'd care to use there)? Making do with limited resources is a hallmark of many lower-powered games, and can be very interesting. Anyone should be able to figure out how to use the Air Force if they owed the PC a favor . . . but what if that favor is owed by the local Pizza Delivery Union?

Another reason to play "normal" people is that it is perhaps the best chance for unsullied roleplaying in the gaming world, depending on the genre. For example, much good science fiction in the literary world deals with the very issue of what it *is* to be human; playing someone close to human power levels in a science fiction game, then, can possibly explore those issues more fully than someone who exists as an elite or powerful member of that world. ("What does it mean to be human in this post-infotronic dystopian mutated landscape of ours, Carl?" "Being human means getting stuck on my vibro-wireblade sawfist for one round instead of two.") If a focus or unusual game world is to explore what life is like in this strange setting -- be it fantasy, science fiction, or historical -- then doing so on a human level can be much more interesting.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, many players may have an easier time playing humans. While it can be difficult to explain why the Kryptoknight gets out of bed to do battle day after day, it should be easy to explain why the gaming college student skips his classes to go investigate the Mysterious Amulet he won at a bar last night.

Okay; so you've got a group of humans. Now what?

Well, quite possibly the biggest thing players and GM need to keep in mind -- if not making it the hammer-onto-anvil clanging focus -- is that the heroes *are* human. They should have human [motivations, goals, and limitations](#) (not to mention human [quirks](#)). In my mind, things are working if -- like a memorable moment from a game of mine -- characters are saying things like, "Well, the apocalypse just has to wait; I need to pick my daughter up from school!"

Next to that, it should be worthwhile to figure out what the stakes are for the world, especially depending on the scope of the game. If people *are* playing truly human characters, then it can be difficult to motivate them, or keep them from trying to get help (if such is available in the game world); most people generally aren't willing to lay down their lives, even if it is in the course of a grand adventure or an earth-shattering plot.

¹ Bonus Pointless Anecdote

Back when I first started working at a comics and game shop, Marvel had created a character that was related to both Spider-Man and Venom (who was, at this time, an anti-hero more than a villain). This character was named Carnage, a completely insane serial-killer with the powers of Spider-Man and a symbiotic

If the playing situation will allow for it, make sure you devote a reasonable amount of time to the subplots and aspects of character development that ties the character to the mortal world. This doesn't need to take a lot of time, in-game: a call from the library on the answering machine wondering where their best librarian is, a fade-out scene of a Thanksgiving dinner with the family, or a completely mundane (but still exciting) tornado warning can do a lot to remind and reinforce that the heroes are, in deed, just plain folks.

Finally, ideally a human-level campaign should probably be designed so that characters can come and go fairly easily. This is for a number of reasons. First, humans are pretty fragile; depending on the game, it shouldn't be too surprising if a character dies. Second, normal folks often have limited goals and desires . . . especially those that tie to the adventuring life. Once the loving wife has rescued her husband from the alien invasion, it can be difficult to justify her continued participation with the party without violating the premise of the human-level game (by, say, making her part of the Elite Humanity Commandos). If the core of the character concept has been fulfilled, then let the human have its happy exit, and allow another normal guy or gal to fill that place in the party. (Besides, the departing character can always come back; just like in life, normal folks have an odd habit of reappearing at the oddest moments . . .)

Playing normal people provides many opportunities for memorable games, and can either be a nice change of pace from the Mega-Skilled Commandos the players are used to, or even as a focus of a game all by themselves. With a little luck, and a bit of practice, you can pretend to be a human.

* * *

Hey, kids! *Pyramid* is having a comic search contest! Yes, we want more comics! Point your browser to <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/contest.html> and see additional details. Hurry . . . the deadline is July 30th!

(And *no*, this does *not* mean we're trying to replace John Kovalic . . . far from it. John's got a home here as long as he wants it -- and maybe even a bit after that, if we can pretend we're the *New Yorker* or something. Comics are fun, and we simply want to add more.)

* * *

You may have noticed that Kenneth Hite and the Suppressed Transmission are missing this week. Is it coincidence that this just *happens* to be so close to the 30th anniversary of the Watergate break-in?

Hopefully he'll be back next week.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: ***Book of Nod*** (for ***Vampire***), p. 20.

(*Two stars*) "Chan Chieh emphasizes the need to depart with haste. He desperately wants to get to the monastery in time to escape another run-in with Kan Kuei.

costume that was capable of morphing into webbing, weaponry, and other useful stuff. (Only in the comics, folks . . .)

Anyway, a kid came to the store one time and wanted to buy comics with that character Carnage . . . pronounced "Car-NAHJE." It took a while to figure out what he was talking about.

Once he was gone (Carnage-containing comic in tow), we started running around the shop, fabricating this entire criminal mastermind named Carnáge.

"Bon jour! I am ze serial killer, Carnáge!"

"Sacré bleu! You are crazy . . . and French!"

"Oui! And see how I gut your friend like le poisson!"

"Mon ami! Carnáge! Non!"

And so on.

(Yes, the movie and cartoon *Clerks* has a special resonance with me . . .)

"* However, *D20* characters may feel that there's always time to hunt for treasure."

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Pyramid Review

Van Richten's Arsenal (for d20)

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#) ([Sword & Sorcery Studios](#))

Edited by **Joseph D. Carriker, Jr.**

160 b&w pages; \$24.95

A long time ago in an edition far away, there was a sourcebook for Ravenloft that provided the players options to customize their characters. That book, [Champions of the Mist](#), has the best elements updated to 3rd edition in Van Richten's Arsenal.

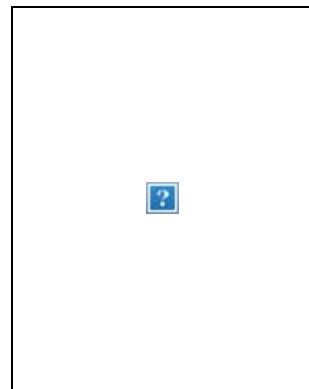
Broken up into six chapters with an Appendix, *Van Richten's Arsenal* provides new mundane and magical items and equipment, rules for alchemy, feats, prestige classes, spells, and methods for hunting the different types of monsters that inhabit Ravenloft. In short, it provides an arsenal. Each chapter has fiction separate from the game terminology, which allows gamers who don't like the *d20* system to at least get a good read.

Chapter 1, "Stakes and Silver," provides the mundane items useful in hunting the creatures of the night. This section includes new weapons like the retractable blade, the cane dagger and cane rapier, as well as a return of the old blunderbuss and the exotic dragon pack. The dragon pack is similar in concept to a squirt gun but instead fires acid, alchemist's fire, holy water, or other potent liquid. One of the innovations here though is the weapon modifications. These changes, like barbs and heating weapons, can be used on multiple types of weapons, and represent a different thinking in terms of making unique items. More variety in unusual materials would have been nice; precious metals have seen use in many genres before, but where's the volcanic glass, the dragon bones, or the infamous meteor steel?

Chapter 2, "Faith and Fury," provides divine and arcane spells. This section suffers the most from the separation between fiction and game mechanics, as instead of just a listing of spells by alphabetical order, spells are broken up into categories like Spells to Aid an Investigation, or Spells of Offense. Spells are given a fictional introduction, like Lay the Unnatural to Rest, and then the spell follows. Spells range from Deconstruct, a 4th level arcane spell that makes constructs more vulnerable to mundane equipment by lowering their damage reduction; to Eternal Slumber, a spell that effects undead by destroying the undead but not the body. The standard part of preventing someone from becoming undead, is a bit too little for this 7th level divine spell, but the ability to cast it on an existing undead makes up for it.

Chapter 3, "Instruments of Power," introduces new weapon enchantments suitable for any weapons like heartseeker. This is similar to a vorpal attack but for piercing weapons where the weapon will seek out the victim's heart on a critical attack. Other enchantments included death bane, a bane weapon that deals damage to a named individual but requires a powers check when used. Sure to please is Fey-Forged, which ignores damage-reduction and weapon immunities. Those not interested in mere weapons also have options. There are other goods like the Eye of the Wicked Sight (an orb that gives the user the feat), Ethereal Empathy, or a Hookah of Truth which creates a zone of truth spell that the smoker is immune to. Those looking for divine magic items will find Witch Pins, which pass through the skin of spellcasters and nonhumans (a neat detection device!) and Icons of the Eternal Order that cast divination and healing spells. Those not satisfied with lower-end items can look for the Bloodknife, an ancient artifact useful for killing the undead and the living (depending on the user's morals) or the Cat of Felkovic, a jade statue that does its own hunting if not provided by the owner.

Chapter 4, "Bottled Lightning," brings to life the world of alchemy. But so many of the items are similar to magic in



effect that the difference between the two is slight. For example, Night Drops allow the user to see better in darkness, or Pungent Powder, which is basically a stink bomb. Each substance is given a DC for alchemy checks for those players with the skills, and this section can almost be lifted whole cloth into any standard *d20* fantasy setting. Those looking beyond powders will enjoy the section on Alchemical Philosophy which provides different levels of Alchemical Formulae, ranging from 1st-level Quintessence (which acts as a high powered healing potion to the living and a bane to the undead) to 3rd-level Tissue Regenerator, which can grow new limbs to replace lost ones. Of course, failure to properly craft the tissues results in some strange side effects as the living limb may take a mind of its own. This section ends with a new template, the Alchemical Child, a living construct used by alchemists to either replace their own withered flesh or even "revive" the dead. In making this a true copy of a living creature though, Alchemical Formulae must be employed.

Chapter 5, "Perilous Pursuits" is sure to please, with new feats and prestige classes. New Feats include Logical Mind, which provides a bonus against various Saves caused by monsters with spell-like or supernatural abilities due to your unbelief in their existence; to Sworn Enemy, which provides a bonus to attack against a specified creature type. For Prestige Classes, the following are provided:

- **Alchemical Philosopher:** A master of alchemy who gains bonus formulas.
- **Anchorite of the Mists:** Clerics of Ezra who use the mists of Ravenloft to their benefit through abilities like Mist Stride, which allows the user to Dimension Door through the Mists; or Turn Mists Creatures, similar to the clerical ability to turn undead.
- **Avenger:** A fighting man whose thirst for revenge against a nemesis provides him with the ability to know where said foe is, and gain Constitution and Wisdom bonuses when engaged in combat with this nemesis or his servants.
- **Crypt Raider:** An homage to Indiana Jones, this Prestige Class has a weapon proficiency with the Whip, bonuses to save against magical and mechanical traps, a massive number of skill points per level, and bonus feats to help top it all off.
- **Dirgist:** A bard-based prestige class whose levels give him new bard abilities based on misery and sorrow, requiring ranks of intimidate and perform to use.
- **Guardian Seeker:** Members of a secret society that gather and destroy evil magic items. They continue their spellcasting ways and gain bonuses to know where evil items are; they can tell such items from normal ones with a glance.
- **Hallowed Witch:** Worshippers of Hala who gain spell resistance and Witchcraft abilities that are spells that can be cast naturally with limits depending on if the ability is a minor, medium or major rank. Spells range from Animal Friendship to Summon Nature's Ally V.
- **Knight of the Shadows:** A warrior-based PrC that casts divine spells and gains bonuses to Diplomacy and Gather Information Checks when dealing with good-aligned characters, as well as the Guardian of Innocence ability which provides a bonus to attack, saving throws, and skill checks when defending good creatures.
- **Pistoleer:** A sharpshooter whose skills with pistols enables him to bounce shots off of other objects, disarm others with precise shots, and perform the dangerous double shot, which lets the character fire two gunpowder weapons in one round. This PrC should work well in the Iron Kingdoms, Freeport, and the Forgotten Realms as these settings allow for the possibility of guns already.
- **Stygian Attendant:** Individuals who hunt down the dead to bring them to their final rest. They use spells and special abilities to find the manner in which ghosts and other special undead can be laid to rest.

Chapter 6, "Tricks and Tactics," is a collection of tips and advice on dealing with the major powers that hunt the night. This section is broken up into the old guidebooks as follows: Vampires, Ghosts, Liches, Lycanthropes, Constructs, Ancient Dead, Fiends, and Hags. Each section discusses how to find that type of monster as well as which spells and items work best against them.

The Appendix "Allies Against the Night" provides the GM with numerous NPCs that are in abbreviated stat blocks. Each section starts with the name, state block, brief background, and detailed background. One interesting option is the Dread Possibility, where GMs can add things to the character to make it more complex, perhaps making allies into unintentional enemies.

The book has the standard layout of two columns of text broken up with illustrations. Thankfully, the charcoal-style drawings from *Denizens of Darkness* are missing. The art style is more in tune with past *Ravenloft* products and is top notch. Layout is pretty good in most cases, but there are a few pages where there's only a paragraph or two of text and lots of white space. The full-page chapter breaks that only have the chapter and its name are also annoying. Otherwise text density is fairly high. Like other recent White Wolf products, this book has arguably too many ads; in this case, six pages are devoted to advertisements.

Van Richten's Arsenal is a top-notch *d20* fantasy book whose usefulness far outweighs the *Ravenloft* connection; the prestige classes, mundane items, and spells will find use in any campaign setting.

--Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Review

FATE Magazine

Published by [FATE Magazine, Inc.](#)

Monthly publication; \$29.95 for one year subscription

If you like *Suppressed Transmissions* you want to get this magazine. If you like horror gaming, you want to get this magazine. If you like weird modern settings, you want to get this magazine. (If you're Ken Hite, you [already](#) read this magazine.) If you're running fantasy campaigns . . . you still probably want to read this magazine, at least at the library.

FATE is devoted to all things weird and wonderful -- UFOs, psychic phenomena, cryptozoology, ghosts, speculations about Atlantis, angels, reader letters about life after death -- everything that might interest player characters and game masters. The style of most articles is clear without being annoyingly "True Believer." Indeed, one recent article about crop circles was written by a self-proclaimed former believer who became convinced that all crop circles are hoaxes. While (naturally) no game statistics are included, it is *full* of information that could be used as plot seeds, or even jumping-off points for entire campaigns.

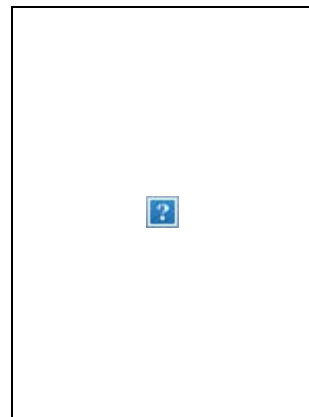
Some examples of interesting tidbits, drawn from the June 2002 issue . . .

- Jesus' twin brother was the one crucified; the real Jesus is buried in Japan. A useful tidbit for a historical or time-traveling campaign!
- Basilisk reports from Jamaica and South Africa; helpful to know if you need spell components.
- How to find where areas of magnetic field deviation are. This is good for detecting areas such as the Bermuda Triangle, or if a UFO is on your tail.
- Modern psi experimentation is accessible from the web (<http://www.gotpsi.org/bi/gotpsi.htm>). Sufficiently fictionalized, such institutions could be Illuminati-like patrons or villains, luring in the Talented with their "harmless" online psi-tests.
- Lake Vostok, in the Antarctic, is possibly a site of an underwater (under ice?) Nazi fortress, a UFO landing pad, dimensional gate, or all of the above. Now you know where you can send your player characters for the Christmas episode; there's plenty of snow there.
- "Thunderbirds" -- huge avians with suspicious resemblance to pterodactyls in some cases -- may be in Canada. Do you have the photographs that this article's author seeks? Do your PCs need to go looking for them, to expose as hoaxes, reveal as truth, or cover up quickly?
- Where is Atlantis? Well, it's not Thera, Crete, Bimini, or Bolivia -- but some people think it's was one of those. Bimini, though, has some very interesting anomalies which might send a bunch of characters there.
- The Moon has fields of umbrellas on it. Solar-power grids? Alien life-forms? Will player character astronauts explore an empty underground base, stalked by strange creatures that click ominously?

And that's only half of the magazine's contents!

From the October 2001 issue, one can find articles about spooks and spirits:

- The "Psychic Frontiers" column takes on a two-part exploration about an apparent haunting (with a resemblance to Darth Vader, though the witnesses had not seen the movie prior to the phenomenon). Poltergeist or subconscious psychic effects? Wait 'til the next column. (This one should give the reader goosebumps.)
- An article by former skeptic about her experiences in a haunted house, and how she became a believer. (This includes wonderful descriptions of haunting "symptoms" which could be used to good effect in a horror campaign.)



- Links between UFOs and cemeteries -- are aliens raiding graves to remove high-tech implants from abductees? Creating brain-scans? Studying backward funeral rituals of a low-tech society on planet "Dirt"?
- Vampire tales from Rhode Island, with annotations of how research has borne out the stories. (Perhaps one of the PCs has a Tillinghast in his or her lineage?)
- The U.S. Hotel in Hollidaysberg, Blair County, Pennsylvania would appear to be haunted; several investigators look into this, including taking photos. (Some of the pictures have mysterious "orbs" in them, others are just plain spooky in a mundane sort of way.)
- In Houston, Texas, the (now closed) Ale House was called Houston's most haunted building. In this article, the author describes how the ghosts there were laid to rest after its closing. The flashbacks to one of the ghosts' murder would also be good for spooking players . . . and their characters, too.

Even if you're only looking for some unique monster ideas for your dungeon crawl, you can still find ideas. Mothman, thunderbirds, a talking mongoose which might or might not have been physical . . .

Standard features include:

- The letters pages, with three separate sections: letters to the editor, letters of life-after-death stories, and letters of supernatural stories.
- "I See By the Papers," which collects and summarizes Especially Weird Newspaper Reports. (This is where the Twin Jesus in Japan came from.)
- "Psychic Frontiers," which concentrates on psychic phenomena.
- Fifty Years Ago -- an article from the *FATE* of fifty years ago, brought back in a "best of *FATE*" nostalgia-type of thing for readers who weren't reading back then. (I wasn't even born back then . . .)
- Book Reviews, of books of the Weird and Supernatural.

Other semi-regular columns also appear, such as "Strange Universe" (focusing, in the June 2002 issue, on Cryptozoology) and "Beyond the Known" (June 2002, including magnetism stories).

So, if you want to indulge in Hitean High Weirdness, or just spice up your game with some authentic descriptions of ghostly spookiness ("Make a perception roll. You feel cold in this corner, and as if something watches you . . ."), pick up a copy of *FATE*. Just don't read it late at night.

--Elizabeth McCoy

The Money College of Magic

For *GURPS IOU* (or any other game where you can bribe the GM to include it . . .)

by Brian Hogue

"Do you have what it takes? The guts and gumption to take on the very best? The ability to keep your mouth shut?"

"But I don't want to be an enforcer! I'm a SCA student!"

"Guido and his people? No, they handle the . . . public relations, you might say. We're the other ones."

What hidden powers lie in the halls of the School of Conservative Arts at Illuminati University? Surely, such publicly utilized power as money can't be their entire source of power. Of course it can be! It's just that some methods of gaining that power may be more esoteric than others and one of them is directly under the control of the ArchDean.

Maybe everything at IOU is directly under her control, but the Mighty One In White does have her special little pet projects. The public face of these is of course, her enforcers, lead by the intimidating Guido. She's got a few others, and it probably isn't surprising that one of them is a hidden graduate-student only department inside the SCA: the Department of Financial Wizardry.

The Economancers are a secret cadre of talented wizards, masterful money manipulators, and other financial geniuses (no old money here, unless it's from an Old Magery family, too, or some other source of actual talent) who work for two important goals.

1. Protect the ArchDean's Stock Values.
2. Get Money.

They know that they are not the only financial arm of the ArchDean, but feel no less important for that. Plus, once they "graduate" they are some of the richest people on the planet. What could be better?

The secret weapons of the Economancers are twofold. First is Voodoo Economics, a Ritual Magic style mostly focusing on the Path of Luck and its various money-assistance (and money hindrance) rituals. Those who follow that path -- which can be anyone, since Ritual Adept and Ritual Aptitude can be trained -- also develop obscure relations with money-minded spirits. It is said that they have even found an ore-bearing version of the Earth Elemental (the gnome) to ally with.

The second, and somewhat more rarified group, are those students who were either born with -- or were granted through some mysterious (and usually expensive) ritual -- Magery or single-College Magery: Money College. That's right, the Money College, a whispered and heretofore unseen Magical College, not under the control of the College of Metaphysics. It's not *strictly* under SCA control, either. Rumor has it that the head of the department is one of the ArchDean's cats (probably a white, fluffy one), but not even the students see their boss in a direct light. There are only a few professors, who make up the "administration" arm of this organization. The work, as always, is done by the grad students.

This, then, is their secret arsenal of hidden spells. They'd be great for any modern wizard, but Caveat Emptor (the motto of this department), for the ArchDean has them so heavily bound in intellectual property rights that any use of them is dangerous; a critical failure (or critical success) might just get her attention . . . The Money College is not their

only means of market manipulation; time travel, mind control, and even well-placed illusions do just as well, and indeed, the risks carried by Money College spells usually means that the Economancers will do anything to avoid having to use them.

Critical failures on money-manipulation or creation spells like Create Money, Shape Finance, or Destroy Money also have a good chance of summoning an IRS Agent (as per Summon IRS Agent, below, with a casting cost equal to energy expended for the spell). Even if only a weak IRS Agent is summoned, it attracts the attention of the IRS as a whole, and repeated screw-ups by Economancers can cause those characters to gain the IRS as an enemy. For that reason, to avoid angering the ArchDean, many of those varieties of spells are cast off-campus, surrounded by powerful pentagrams.

Note that all of these spells are based upon the subjective ideas of the person involved; someone from the Aurient on Discworld would not view a gold coin (much less the devalued currency of Ankh-Morpork) as a particularly valuable item, but a citizen of Ankh-Morpork might find Agatean paper money very valuable if he knew how much gold he could get for it. Similarly, someone brought out of the past might not find much value in a single coin from their time, but to a collector, or anyone who recognizes what collections can be worth, it might be very valuable indeed.

Any spell cast on a diffuse target or class of targets such as a corporation can be targeted by going to the "center" of that target/class. This does not mean just walking up to corporate HQ and touching the wall. The CEO's office, the main boardroom, or even an important secretary's desk all may be used for this purpose.

Many of these spells are resisted by IQ, making them difficult or impossible to use on standard *GURPS* demons or Summoned IRS Agents. Said creatures harbor no compunctions about using them on others. This raises the interesting question of what units demons use to measure soul-currency in. Thankfully, this means that neither the summonable IRS Agents or Demons can be affected by Resist Money, and are quite amenable to bribery.

Money levels, whether in cost or amount, are based off the standard fantasy environment. They should be multiplied by the usual amounts in different eras. The GM may, however, wish to be a bit less generous with some of the more powerful spells like Shape Stock Market or Create Money.

Seek Money (VH)

Information

This is the pride and joy of the Economancers, their basic spell, and, unfortunately, their biggest embarrassment. Someone leaked it to the outside world that one of the ArchDean's favorite suits was enchanted with this spell and that led to the discovery of the Money College in general by the College of Metaphysics. It tells the caster the direction, distance, and general nature of the nearest significant amount of any one type of financial power.

However, the details are slightly different. This doesn't mean that it just leads them to the nearest coinage, or other physical money. It can lead the caster toward a bank with a dumb loan board, or toward a rich-but-gullible dreamer. It would tell the caster, for example, if an individual was carrying checks or credit cards that could draw upon large sources of wealth, if the caster chose to look for "accounts" or something similar. While the spell will give the general nature of the money-source, it will not tell the caster how to obtain the money. That's up to the caster -- or his financial advisor -- to figure out on their own. Known sources of the specific type of money may be screened out if the caster specifically mentions them before casting the spell.

This is also a Knowledge spell.

Cost: 4

Time to Cast: 10 seconds

Prerequisites: Magery, Divination (Plutomanacy) (p. TM23)

Item: A forked stick, a suit of clothing, or a gem. The gem must have a 'star' in it, like a star sapphire, which will rise out of the gem to lead the caster towards the nearest source of money.

Energy cost to create: 80. The "stick" must be inlaid with enough precious material or unique artwork to make its

price \$500; the suit should be worth at least that much. The gem can be made significantly cheaper, but for every division by two (\$250, \$125, etc.) of the base price, the fatigue cost to use the spell increases by four.

Test Money

Information

Lets the caster know if a given currency is sound or not. This includes financial stability of the source of the money and if it is counterfeit. It does not, however, say whether or not the money is magically enchanted (although created money WILL show up as having a limited lifespan . . .). It can be used to check stocks and similar items of financial interest, but cannot be used to appraise buildings, artwork, or similar items of "indirect" financial worth. It can, however, test the purity of precious metals.

This is also a Knowledge spell.

Cost: 1 to test one particular unit of money, or 3 per hex to check all the money in a 1-hex area.

Item: Staff, scales, wand, or jewelry. The jewelry may be in the form of a magnifying glass with a gem-lens. Modern wizards might also enchant a cash register. *Energy cost to create:* 100.

Exchange

Regular

Originally called "Money to Other Money" by the finance wizard who invented it, the name was hastily changed by his partner, who had some experience in marketing. This spell allows the caster to exchange any on-hand currency for any other type of currency, at precise current market value. This may be less than what they could get for it if they haggled! It will not get them money in exchange for valuable items: they will actually have to sell that sort of object, such as mined gold or stocks. Company scrip in cyberpunk games can, however, be exchanged for its real worth. If the GM does have access to the flux rolls (p. CW61) he may wish to use them for large denomination changes.

Duration: Permanent

Cost: 2 for cash up to \$20, 3 for up to \$100, and an additional 4 for each additional \$100. For very large changes, see Shape Finance, below.

Prerequisite: Test Money

Item: Staff, scales, wand, or jewelry.

Shape Finance (VH)

Regular; resisted by IQ

Lets the caster alter a target's, or, more usually, two targets' financial status, such as the arrangement of stocks, the types of currency they hold, and the location or status of their total net worth (into and out of liquid assets, for example). It may also be used to exchange very large amounts of cash cheaper than with Exchange. This spell cannot generate additional "value" although the rearrangement may end up producing money if, say, cash is transmitted into stocks. This spell usually must be cast on two or more different targets, unless it is transferring (for example) between one individual's checking and savings accounts or switching types of money. Use total distance modifiers to both targets. Shaping does not incur transaction fees and takes place at a "rate" of \$2,000 per second. It does not require banks or stock agents to process the forms.

An unstable arrangement of money -- GM's call, such as an arrangement that would cost more per year than the targets' earning could support -- will last only while the spell continues, although no special concentration is required, and then it will collapse, leaving the target penniless. A smart caster, however, could use time with a highly unstable financial situation to get a significant advantage on the market, especially in a fast-paced stock exchange. If cast on diffuse entities, such as a corporation, the GM should use the Resistance to Area Spells on p. M14. To avoid large rolls, the GM may wish to use the skills percentage on p. B45 at the level of the average resistance, minus the amount by which the caster made, to determine how much of the finance "resists" and cannot be shaped.

Duration: 1 minute

Cost: 8 per \$1,000 of net worth to be shaped; 4 to maintain. The entire value of a specific item must be paid for to manipulate it: a caster could spend 80 to manipulate a \$10,000 account out of a target's net worth of \$250,000, but could not spend 40 to manipulate just \$5,000 out of that account.

Prerequisite: Magery, Sense Money, Exchange

Item: Staff, wand, jewelry, or appropriate equipment for mundane money manipulation. Appropriate equipment might be: A quill or pen used to write checks, a stock broker's paddle, a PDA with digital access specifically for on-line brokerage. *Energy cost to create:* 800.

Create Money (VH)

Regular

When cast, will create currency where none existed previously! This spell will only produce actual money, not raw material (e.g., pure gold or things that may be sold for money, such as artwork or stock). The money produced will be a perfect replica of the real thing, including all anti-counterfeit measures; although in a public-magic universe, those measures may include magic resistant material or enchantments -- which would reduce the skill of the caster accordingly -- or magic-immune materials. In the latter case, that measure or the entire currency may not be reproducible. Also, the produced money will definitely be magical and can be detected as such by mages. Finally, in any world, there may be secret magic-resistance worked in to some denominations -- eye in the pyramid dollars, anyone?

Clever conjurors may cause the money to be produced out of coin machines or ATMs to conceal their magical usage. They might also do this to impress -- you can imagine everyone else's face when you wander nonchalantly up to the ticket machine, press coin return, and 50 quid in pound coins comes out of it. In any case, this does not affect the actual money held by the machine. Use Shape Finance for that.

This is also an Illusion and Creation spell.

Duration: One hour.

Cost: 2 per \$10 to be created. May not be maintained, but may be made permanent for 10 times cost. Half the cost if the caster has some physical representation of the money to be created -- for example, gold-foil covered chocolate coins!

Prerequisite: Shape Finance, Shape Earth

Item: Staff, wand, money-manufacturing equipment such as a printing press, or a money-holding item, such as a wallet or the traditional ever-full bag of gold. *Energy cost to create:* 600.

Coin Jet

Regular

Lets the spellcaster shoot a thin jet of coins from one finger. Each turn, the caster rolls versus DX-4 or Magic Jet to hit, and rolls for damage if he hits. This attack may be dodged or blocked, but not parried. Treat it as a hand weapon -- like a whip made of coins -- and it cannot parry. The coins created by this spell will be of the smallest denomination made of hard metals that is known to the caster, and will only last for about an hour after the spell terminates. However, a bathtub of pennies is still an enormous sum to be gotten for only a few seconds of coin-blasting (as long as the bathtub survives the "attack"), and clever players will be able to do much in an hour with that sum.

This is also a Technological (Metals and Plastics) spell.

Duration: One second

Cost: 1 to 3. Will inflict 1d-1 damage and has a range of 1 hex for each point of energy spent. Cost to maintain is the same. Will be new coinage, so may dazzle opponents in bright light.

Prerequisite: Create Money

Item: Staff, wand, or jewelry. *Energy cost to create:* 800. Will not create more coins per second than would equal its

monetary value.

Destroy Money (VH)

Regular

Causes money (in any form, be it value of a corporation, piece of artwork, or cash in hand) to vanish without a trace! In the case of devaluing something, it will simply cause the item, for whatever reason, to not be worth quite as much. This may be useful for tax purposes to cast on the Economancer's own property!

It cannot be used to devalue currency or a class of items unless the caster (probably through vast ceremonial magic and some way of reaching everywhere that the currency is -- or utilizing the Law of Contagion with its manufacturing center) can affect each and every item. This will not cause anything but actual currency to disappear.

Careful usage of this spell can utterly destroy a stock market, by devaluing important stock prices or causing runs on the market. The caster might only have to affect one or a few corporations. Most worlds, however, have individuals or entities watching for such things. In IOU, this will very definitely attract the attention of the ArchDean. Use at your own peril.

This can be, in a silly world, a Fire spell as well, in which case cash will go up in flames, coins will melt, artwork will show fire damage or ash, etc.

Duration: Permanent.

Cost: 3 per \$10 to be destroyed. There must be a real-world change in the target -- for example, if you wanted to destroy the value of all baseball cards of a certain type, there must be at least a 1 cent change -- or whatever the GM considers "significant."

Prerequisite: Create Money, Ignite Fire.

Item: (a) Wand, staff, or jewelry. *Energy cost to create:* 300. (b) Wallet, bag, or other money-holding item. Always on. Will destroy any money placed into it. *Energy cost to create:* 600.

Predict Stock Market (VH)

Information

This useful spell allows the caster to accurately forecast the ups and downs of the market, barring other supernatural intervention. If the spell is overused in a campaign world, the GM may wish to apply penalties similar to those under divination on p. M55 for multiple questions. Unlike Plutomantic divination, this will not answer yes-or-no questions, and cannot tell the precise reasons for the change in the stock market or anything else, other than just what the stock market will do. Most financial wizards tend to use this spell instead of direct market-manipulation, unless direct manipulation is the only way to go, as there is less chance of summoning an IRS Agent.

Cost: 4 times the length of the forecast for a general look at the market, in days. Double the cost for a specific stock.

Time to Cast: 1 minute per day forecast

Prerequisite: At least 4 Money spells

Money to Stocks (VH)

Regular

Lets the caster exchange their money for stocks. Unlike Shape Finance, this spell will actually create stocks in the corresponding company, which will register as an increase on the market. It may, however, also decrease the end value of the stocks, and like all market-involved spells, carries considerable risk if done carelessly or in large amounts.

Duration: Permanent.

Cost: 3 per \$100 (before transmutation) transmuted into stock.

Prerequisite: Predict Stock Market, Shape Finance

Item: Staff, wand, jewelry, or stock ticker machine. *Energy cost to create:* 500.

Shape Stock Market (VH)

Regular; Special Resistance (see below)

This awesome spell is used only with the greatest of trepidation. Like Great Wish, it can never be learned at a level higher than 15 (although ceremonial magic may double that as high as 30), and the effects of a backlash are best left to the imagination, especially in a world connected to IOU, where the ArchDean is concerned. The Stock Market should be given some resistance roll determined by the GM based upon how many stocks the spell involves (not a direct correlation, unless the GM is feeling really nasty), with which it will vigorously resist any attempted tampering. If the wizard is successful, he may alter the market as he wills, "moving" it a rate of 10 points per minute overall, or 1 point per minute if he is manipulating specific stock. The effects themselves are theoretically permanent, although the stock market moves very quickly indeed.

Duration: 1 hour. May not be maintained.

Cost: 8 per point of stock. All stock points must be manipulated in order to affect the market at all.

Time to Cast: 1 minute per hundred points of stock in overall market.

Prerequisite: Shape Finance, Money to Stocks, Predict Stock Market, and a combined IQ + Economics score of 40.

Item: None known, but IOU Campus Legends claim that some of THE computer's sub-computers have been enchanted with this spell and hooked up to a fusion reactor . . .

Audit (VH)

Information; Resisted by IQ

Although a spell with such a fearsome name might be thought to be the exclusive province of the foul IRS Agents, this spell was actually invented by the Economancers. They use it in order to perform credit checks on potential students for the ArchDean, and to check the Departments' and Colleges' financial status reports, as well as on investments. When cast, it will give the caster a detailed report on the target's credit history, financial status, investments, net worth, and similar relevant information. It will not give any descriptions other than financial and a name/label for that financial information, but that can often be enough for whatever purpose the caster might have (e.g., finding a \$20,000 investment in "Lulu's Strip Joint Chain And Merchandising" in a prominent televangelist's Audit report might make for good blackmail). The caster may specify that the spell give only certain types of financial information (hidden, more than \$10,000, etc.).

This is also a Knowledge Spell.

Duration: Will be remembered perfectly for one hour, after which point, the caster is on his own (other than maintaining the spell)

Cost: 4, 2 to maintain.

Prerequisite: Seek Money

Item: A printer, a quill, or a computer. Will produce a form detailing the audit. *Energy cost to create:* 200.

Mass Audit (VH)

Area: Information; Resisted by IQ

As above, but can be cast over an area. The caster must be careful either to filter the incoming information or set up some form of mental multitasking to receive the information or he may be Mentally Stunned (Will roll minus half the number of people affected; mental multitasking is judged by the GM and up to player creativity). Rumor has it that the ArchDean is capable of casting this spell over the entire campus at once, for all forms of financial information, without breaking a sweat.

This is also a Knowledge Spell.

Cost: 3, 2 to maintain
Time to Cast: 5 seconds per energy point spent.
Prerequisite: Audit, Economics 13+

Resist Audit (VH)

Regular

This interesting spell was devised early in the history of the Economancers' war with the IRS Agents. Indeed, legend has it that the specific formula to create this spell was one of the ArchDean's real reasons for establishing the Money College in the first place. The story goes that, as all beings have opposites, the hidden "Master of the Revenue" (the true power behind the IRS and its various companion-agencies all throughout the cosmos) was causing the ArchDean some serious trouble in her take-over attempt at IOU. In fact, the current tradition of the Unseen Dean, say the Financial Wizards, comes from the hidden Master. The ArchDean's incoming staff included the founder of the Economancer Department, and he or she gained power from hastily devising the spells necessary in order to thwart the Master of Revenue. Naturally, the ArchDean only smiles when anyone alludes to this theory.

In any event, it is a powerful spell. Resist Audit makes the subject -- usually a person and his financial holdings, although a specific holding may be targeted -- totally immune to the effects of audits, in much the same manner as Resist Fire conveys immunity to flame and heat. Also like Resist Fire, this is not a contestable spell; Resist Audit, unless Countered or Dispelled, will trump the Audit and Mass Audit spells. Any investigation into the financial dealings of the person involved will yield totally legitimate results for the duration of the spell. Later investigations that use new evidence may find different results, but any investigation based on the results of one affected by Resist Audit will be completely flawed. Resist Audit will not affect previous investigations or evidence garnered up to the point of casting; those will remain, but no new investigations will turn up anything worthwhile.

This is also a Mind Control Spell.

Duration: 1 day.

Cost: 4 per person, 2 per day to maintain. Cost doubles if the subject must resist Summoned IRS Agents, who, being magical themselves, are more difficult to fool.

Prerequisite: Create Money, Test Money

Item: Staff, wand, or jewelry. Affects the wearer only. *Energy cost to create:* 1200 energy; must include valuables of some type adding up to \$800. May also be cast permanently on a document detailing a single financial holding or situation, for 200 energy, which will be always on but will only affect that document.

Resist Money (VH)

Regular; May be resisted by IQ

This spell was initially developed (in the IOU universe, at least) as a form of punishment. It might be used by a monastic order (not the Yen Buddhists, though) to attempt to free themselves from that symbol of worldly things, money, but for the Economancers, it is their secret weapon against those who seem to be too lucky in the world of finance. Resist Money makes the target totally immune to money and its blandishments. The target will be able to totally resist bribes or other forms of influence dependent on money, but will also be totally incapable of gaining money in any form or manner. He will not be able to win the lottery, earn a living, or have his stocks split. He will not even notice pennies on the sidewalk. Birthday cash presents will be lost in the mail: a true horror for a college student. He will not, however, be immune to the effects of money loss, and the cost of living for his status (p. B191) will be still very much in effect.

This is also a Mind Control Spell.

Duration: 1 day.

Cost: 4 per person, 2 per day to maintain. Cost doubles if the subject must resist truly stupendous cash amounts (over a million); cost triples if the subject must resist the elemental power of amounts over a billion or more.

Prerequisite: Destroy Money, Audit

Item: Staff, wand, or jewelry. Affects the wearer only. *Energy cost to create:* 1200 energy; must include valuables of some type adding up to \$800.

Block Credit (VH)

Regular; Resisted by IQ

A subtler outgrowth of the Resist Money spell, this (slightly cheaper -- or more Economized, the department would say) spell prevents the subject from accessing any form of "unreal" money and credit, such as checks, credit cards, or debit cards. The subject must use actual cash or barter to get goods. He will not be given money in such a fashion either, whether by loans or electronic transfer. Previously friendly shop clerks will not allow the subject to pay them later or to defer payment in any way other than barter, such as helping out at the store (but such help must be fairly immediate or enforced by supernatural means such as a Geas spell, not a mundane promise of future aid).

It is often more useful than Resist Money in attacking an enemy, as its effects are usually neither as immediate nor as blatant. Unlike Resist Money, it prevents credit loss as well as credit gain. Block Credit may be used as a blocking spell, either to stop a Money College spell (the entire College seems to be a sort of "metaphysical credit union" -- which, given the ArchDean's business acumen, may not be a metaphor) or to prevent one transaction. In such a case the spell is instant and has no duration.

This is also a Mind Control spell.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost: 2 to cast, 1 to maintain.

Prerequisite: Resist Money

Destroy Credit Rating (VH)

Regular; Resisted by IQ

Sometimes, the nastiest attacks aren't nearly enough. Destroy Money might seem like a fairly horrendous thing to do to a person, but it is unfortunately limited in that it can only destroy money that is actually there. A particularly vicious scion of the urban jungle, trained by the Economancers, created this spell in memory of his days dealing with unpleasant credit card companies. It operates on the same principle as Destroy Money, only more so. While it will not function on "real" money, it is otherwise fundamentally similar to Destroy Money; it causes the subject's "unreal" money, such as savings accounts, to vanish. Furthermore, it will ring up debts, drop savings accounts below zero, run up credit card charges, and default on loans. Used with precision, it can destroy someone utterly, and make it impossible for him to fight back. After all, getting a lawyer to clear your name takes money, too, doesn't it?

This is also a Mind Control spell.

Cost: 4 per \$10 to be destroyed. It may not be used on objects or on any similar object that would require a minimum value of 0.

Prerequisite: Block Credit Rating

Item: Wand, staff, or jewelry. *Energy cost to create:* 400

Summon IRS Agent

Special

Calls an evil magical bureaucrat; use the expanded demon generation tables on pp. G82-83, with the exception of the Special Abilities table and the racial template (see below). Incoming Infernal Revenue Spirits are usually rather nasty in temperament and prone to demon-like assaults on people. One notable distinction between IRS Agents and demons is a lack of creativity in both personality and appearance. The IRS Agents are uniformly dour and humorless, all wearing suits. They are always neatly groomed . . . well, right up until the claws pop out and they try to get the taxes

out of you in the traditional pound of flesh.

The mechanics of the spell are otherwise similar to Summon Demon, save that countermeasures and demon-affecting magic, such as Pentagrams and Banish, are at -10 if the character doesn't have some form of money-management skill at 15 or higher (Accounting, Economics, or Merchant, for example) or Summon IRS Agent, as the nature of the beasts involved is slightly different. Knowing the names of Summonable IRS Agents doesn't help with either summoning or controlling them. (Most of them are named "Smith" or "Jones," anyway.)

Summoned IRS Agents can only be forced to perform tasks involving money and its collection and/or monitoring. They cannot be forced to protect or conceal financial misdoings on the part of their summoner, although they can be bribed! The general use of this spell is (by the Economancers) to bring down the wrath of Authority upon their enemies or (by the IRS Agents themselves) to summon back-up.

Use of this spell on the IOU campus is strictly forbidden. In fact, it's so forbidden, unless you know the spell exists, you don't know that there's a rule against it and those that do know, have no idea what horrible penalty will be inflicted for its deliberate use. The unfortunate tendency of Money College Spells when backfiring to summon IRS Agents is another reason why the Department is so hush-hush and treads lightly with their magic. Hopefully, the ArchDean would look upon an accidental summoning as no worse than she would a normal action that brought the IRS to campus . . . Fortunately, this spell is significantly harder than Summon Demon, as most IRS Agents dislike to be brought away from their important business.

This is also a Necromantic Spell.

Duration: 1 day. May not be maintained. If the agent completes the task for which it is summoned, it is free to act as it wishes if the caster does not remember to end the spell.

Cost: 40

Time to Cast: 1 hour. The casting requires filling out a copious amount of forms. High-skill casters know the special tricks and redundant information, and so will fill out fewer forms.

Prerequisite: Literacy, Magery, and at least one spell from each of ten different colleges.

Item: It is rumored that the cell-phones carried by the Agents can make summoning more Agents easier, but this has never been verified.

Special Abilities

(Based off the Extended Demonic Special Abilities table on p. G83.)

Roll three six-sided dice.

Roll Special Ability

- 3 Bonuses to reaction roll from bribery are doubled.
- 2 Paper trail; leaves generic tax forms in its wake as it moves.
- 1 Goes berserk at the sight of loose change (for 2d minutes).
- 0 Very ardent; if not given a suitable task quickly will attempt to audit any legal target.
- 1 Has no sense of hearing and will require all communication to be done by forms. In triplicate.
- 2 Takes 1 hit of damage per turn when away from the spot where it appeared.
- 3 Actually has fashion sense. Suit will be impressive and distracting.
- 4 Regenerates 1 hit per turn; roll again.
- 5 Unaffected by material money. Must be offered something . . . more important.
- 6 Skill 21 with Economics, Law, Accounting, and all Money Spells.
- 7 1d-3 extra pairs of arms (minimum 1), each with their own set of forms, calculators, etc. with relevant skill at 16.
- 8 Has Mage-Stealth (see p. M79) for 4d hours.

- 9 Summon two Agents instead of one; split IQ equally between the two; roll again.
- 10 Tunneling level 4; often used through mounds of paper.
- 11 Roll twice more.
- 12 Strong Will +3; roll again.
- 13 Mass Audit-25 for 5 ST cost.
- 14 Has the Terror advantage (p. U60) with a -5 to Fright Check.
- 15 Teleport-21 for 10 ST cost.
- 16 Strong Will +5; roll again.
- 17 Can use Destroy Credit Rating-21 once per appearance on this plane.
- 18 Invulnerable to physical attacks.
- 19 Knows all Money and Knowledge Spells at skill 25.
- 20 Regenerates 4 hits per turn; roll again.
- 21 Spit Acid-25 with a 5d base damage for 4 ST. Must rant about tax evaders for 1 second before casting.
- 22 Has a second suit. When changed into the second suit, re-roll all abilities. Including IQ.
- 23 Destroys any bank account by touching a physical representation, for 10 ST cost.
- 24 Has 1d Agents in Training (roll on all tables at -6) under its tutelage.
- 25 Has the support of a small, secret cult in local law enforcement and/or government.
- 26 Can access the bank account of any creature it sees for 2d minutes.
- 27 Knows all spells of any one of the following colleges at Skill 30: Money, Knowledge, Communication and Empathy, Mind Control. (GM's choice if this result was rolled; caster's choice otherwise.)
- 28 Corrupt Agent summoned! It has the use of Shape Stock Market-15 once per appearance on this plane. The energy cost is already paid for.

Infernal Revenue Spirit Agent 250 points

Based on Demon template (p. SPI52)

Advantages: Doesn't Fatigue [15]; Extra Fatigue 5 [15]; Invulnerability (spells resisted by IQ) [75]*; Mathematical Ability [10]; Spirit Form (Physical Form +80%, Unlimited Lifespan +30%) [210].

*Agents resist these spells automatically. This is a modification of Invulnerability (p. CI59).

Disadvantages: Cannot Harm Innocents (Prevents direct harm of only truly honest folk or those who do not care about money (holy folk may be included if they are tax-exempt in the area where the Agent is summoned) -30%) [-8]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Social Stigma (IRS Agent) [-15]; Vulnerability (1d from shotguns) [-10]; and at least 25 points in unpleasant (or at least inconvenient) mental or social disadvantages: Odious Personal Habits, Curiosity, and in some rare cases, Code of Honor (Will not take bribes).

Skills: Accounting (M/H) at IQ+5 [4]*; Law (Tax Law) (M/H) at IQ+5/IQ-1 [4]. Both skills will apply to the area in question.

*Includes +5 for Mathematical Ability

Uses in Campaigns

While developed from an IOU setting, the Money College is applicable to any genre where money is used, although some of the spells (especially the stock market group) are only really useful once banking and corporations have been developed. Its use needs to be restricted carefully by the GM, as money can be a source of real power. In particular, a good watch should be kept over the caster's net worth, and if it increases significantly, should be paid for by changes in the Wealth advantage.

A few of these spells, such as Summon IRS Agent or Coin Jet, are probably not too applicable to a non-silly world. However, the rest can fit in quite well. In a "secret magic" campaign, especially Illuminated or Cyberpunk (or both!) settings, knowledge of the Money College would be an invaluable weapon. Wars might be fought over books

containing even one of the basic spells, as they led to understanding of the rest. Development of the college might lead to the birth of an entirely new corporation or conspiracy.

Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* is another setting in which the spells may be of great use. Financial Wizardry may not occur to the fiercely independent witches, or the somewhat static senior wizards, but the development or discovery of these spells by a desperate university student (perhaps one named after Alan Greenspan) could be the start of an interesting adventure. The Patrician might become quite sarcastic if there is a magical counterfeiter on the loose. Indeed, considering the Ankh-Morpork dollar-based economy of the Discworld, an adventure or campaign to hide the knowledge of the Money College may turn into a Chance to Save the World.

In *IOU*, this college will be under the firm hand of the ArchDean and her Economancers. PCs may run afoul of an Economancer who takes a disliking to their success in the finance world, or be ensnared in an obscure stock market ploy. It is also a nasty surprise to spring on players who think that the SCA is full of rich mundanes who couldn't possibly stand against their psionic blackmailers and Bearers of the Enchanted Swiss Army Knife. This can be a good way to regulate the power of PCs with Multimillionaire, who may be otherwise giggling happily as they fund their Gadgeteer friends' projects to, say, develop a new bio-ogre or develop an army of mecha to take over the English department.

Another possibility is the recruitment of one or more of the PCs to the Department of Financial Wizardry, as an extension of a graduate-level campaign. Unless a PC is very precocious, the ArchDean is unlikely to trust an undergrad with the knowledge of this powerful hidden weapon. Not only will the new member(s) have to deal with obscure and very difficult tasks, the failure of which might be directly supervised by the ArchDean, but they'll have to handle the problems of their new lifestyle. How will the PC deal with the double-life? The strange, and possibly unholy rituals involving magpie feathers? The insane amounts of wealth available to them? That last one might be easy to deal with, except that the ArchDean requires absolute secrecy, and public splurging (as well as private investment from unexplained sources in one's friends) is most heartily discouraged.

* * *

(Special thanks to Shatavari, JohnB, Anthony, Jo, NVDaydreamer, rv, and the others on PyraMOO who helped me with the specifics and names. And of course, MUCH thanks to Archangel Beth, for the great IOU. :))

(For my brother, with whom I laughed too little.)

Pyramid Review

Big Aisle, Small Cart

Published by Placebo Press

Written by Eric Kriser & Chuck Wilhelm

Illustrated by Stephanie Brandl

72 cards & rules; \$5.95

Big Aisle, Small Cart is the card game of Japan's number one grocery combat show: Happy Fun Shopping Battle. Falling into the Cheapass Games design and price bracket, it comes complete with a deck of seventy-two cards and a four-page A5 rules leaflet. The game is parody through and through -- from the title (does it remind you of a certain anime themed RPG?), through the type of Japanese games shows we have goggled at on the television, to the unintentionally absurd translations found on the supermarket shelves of Happy Fun Shopping Battle!

For three to six players, the objective of *Big Aisle, Small Cart* is to be the first contestant to fill their shopping cart with five items of different suits, while battling to prevent the other competitors from doing the same. This is done through the cards; the actual act of hurrying around a supermarket in search of the right item off the shelf is not actually part of *Big Aisle, Small Cart*, which in some ways is a pity, though there is probably room for a game of trolley to trolley combat in this vein on the shelves of your friendly local games store . . .

The cards come in two types -- Items and Specials. Each Item card has two suit symbols upon it. The first represents its actual Suit that counts towards winning the game, and the second its Stop Suit for use in shopping cart combat. The card also has a matching title, illustration and a single line of flavor text -- all of them equally silly and many of them, just a little risqué. These include:

[THE EASILY OFFENDED SHOULD SKIP THIS BIT . . .]

- Super Hi-Grade Digital Tampons -- "Now with text messaging."
- More Damn Noodles -- "Also try more damn rice."
- Mamma Wasabe's Carbonated Fish Gravy -- "It's like drinking ocean."
- Frosted Fish Brand Breakfast Cereal -- "With colorful marshmallow scales."
- Cheesy Otter Juice Pops -- "For joyful mouth to suck."
- Salty Gay Nuts -- "If it tastes gay, you're eating our nuts."
- Mamma Wasabe's Edible Condoms -- "Available in cherry, strawberry and fish."
- Hola Kitty Adult Diapers -- "When Kitty's face turns green, it's full."

[IT SHOULD BE SAFE TO RESUME.]

The Special cards just have a title and a description of their effect, without any of the humor of the Item cards. These effects include giving a player another action in a round, letting him slip an Item card into the cart of another player or stealing an item out of it, completely destroying an Item card in play, or simply countering an attack or a Special card played against him.

At the game's beginning, each contestant receives a hand of five cards. On his turn each player can conduct as many as two actions: play an Item card into his cart (it is placed on the table in front of him and counts towards the cart's five card limit), make an attack upon an Item within another contestant's cart, play a Special card, or remove and discard an



Item card already in their cart. This last action actually counts as the two whole actions allowed a player during their turn, rather than just the one.

Combat is simple and involves the attacking player matching the Suit of the target Item with the Stop Suit of a card held in their hand. The attack will be successful unless the defending player can counter the Suit of the attacking card with a Stop Suit of a card held in their hand. The attacker can respond likewise against the counterattack (and so on and so on), until either player runs out of matching Stop Suits or even totally out cards in their hand, or decides not to pursue the combat . . . Anyway, all cards involved in the combat are discarded. If the defender is the final winner, then the target card remains in their cart; but if the attacker is successful, not only is the target Item card discarded from the defender's cart, but also all contestants then have to pass their complete hands to the player on their right!

The same rules apply when a player decides to target an Item card in his cart, but instead of just the one person defending that card, any other player can do so. The advantage to a successful attack that removes the card is that it counts as a single action rather than the two it normally would to remove the same Item. Of course, if successful, everyone still has to pass his or her hand to the right . . . At the end of their turn, a player refreshes their hand back up to five cards.

The simplicity of play in *Big Aisle, Small Cart* will keep games relatively short, but the humor will keep the players coming back to try their luck at Happy Fun Shopping Battle. Some groups may want to drop the rule bout passing hands after successful combat, as they may find it more than a little frustrating. Yet it is amusing and it does befit the genre being lampooned -- can you really understand those Japanese game shows? The real fun in *Big Aisle, Small Cart*, however, lies in the silly titles and flavor text of the Item cards. An equally silly and cheerful Japanese accent is not required to play, but it certainly adds to atmosphere of *Big Aisle, Small Cart*.

--Matthew Pook

Replacement Transmission

The Bisociated Battleground

by Phil Masters

"Short tale to make -- we at Saint Albans met, Our battles join'd, and both sides fiercely fought . . . "
-- Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 3*.

But let's make *our* tale a little longer. For, while some speak of high [Mount Shasta](#), and some of [San Luis](#), of [Chicago](#) and [Bohemia](#), and such great places as these, of all the world's great illuminated hang-outs, there's few that can compare with a nomenclaturally bisociated bourgeois dormitory in southeast England -- at least, if you look hard enough. Its first name (supposedly) fades into the Celtic twilight. Its second, born in a baptism of blood and miraculously sanctified water, has dark power, carrying civil war across oceans. Time and lies both begin here, nailing it hard to reality even as one of the masters of conspiracy leaves clues as to his activities, painted on the walls of a local pub. Oh, and only recently, the movie industry contrived to have a bit of it replicated a whole planet away.

Some mundane background first. [St. Albans](#) is a prosperous commuter belt town around 20 miles north of London. It comes complete with a cathedral (making it technically a city), a market which has been running for a thousand years, and a decent set of Roman remains. The last can mostly be found in the town's park, or in the adjacent museum, full of mosaics and suchlike finds. Thanks to these, the town makes a bit of tourist industry play of its Roman history, and unlike most British towns which go back that far it has long made a habit of using its Roman name, *Verulamium*, as an alternate.

It started out (we're told) as a Celtic settlement, the capital of the Catuvellauni tribe. One of their chiefs, Tasciovanus, set up a mint here, doubtless trying to look sophisticated, and some Celtic stuff shows up in archaeological digs in the area. (The Celtic boundary ditches have nicknames like the "Devil's Ditch," which isn't actually unusual, thanks to the superstitions of medieval peasants -- although maybe we should pay attention to them this time.) But things really took off with the Roman conquest, as the Empire took over and settled its own people here -- and then, not long after, things went downhill in a big way.

". . . ruin fell on the town of Verulamium, for the barbarians, who delighted in plunder and were indifferent to all else, passed by the fortresses with military garrisons, and attacked whatever offered most wealth to the spoiler, and was unsafe for defense. . . . For it was not on making prisoners and selling them, or on any of the barter of war, that the enemy was bent, but on slaughter, on the gibbet, the fire and the cross, like men soon about to pay the penalty, and meanwhile snatching at instant vengeance."

-- Tacitus, *The Annals*

Indeed -- for the Romans ran into one of those traditional occupying power problems. Queen Boudica of the Iceni (see *GURPS Who's Who I*) revolted in AD 60, and one of the settlements her army destroyed during this rebellion was Verulamium. Boudica had a lot to be angry about, to be sure, but Tacitus's words suggest that there was a special edge of desperation or fury to these acts. It sounds like either they sensed that something had to be destroyed, or something was goading them on.

Still, the Romans bounced back and rebuilt. The place got a market hall, a forum, a good theater -- the usual Roman comforts. Then, a couple of centuries later, the town earned its other name. Christianity had come to the western edge of the Empire, and with it, persecution. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* dates the death of St. Alban to c.304, but other sources place it nearly a century earlier, in 209, making him one of the earliest Christian martyrs in northern Europe. More to the point, he's usually described as the first in Britain.

The tale comes from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, which tells us that he was a pagan inhabitant of Verulamium during a period when Christians were being persecuted. One Christian priest took refuge with Alban, who was inspired and

eventually converted by him. Later on, when the governor's guards came to search the house, Alban disguised himself in the priest's cloak, and gave himself up to save his guest. He was then condemned to death for his new faith.

Early Christian saints -- or their biographers -- never could resist adding a few miracles at this sort of juncture, and it is said that, on his way to the execution ground, Alban stopped the flow of a river so that everyone could cross safely, then caused a spring to flow on the summit of the hill where executions took place. The first executioner, not perhaps surprisingly, converted to Christianity at the sight of all this, and his replacement was struck blind after performing his task.

Slightly later texts declare that the priest's name was Amphibalus, and that he and some others were stoned to death a few days afterwards at Redbourn, four miles from St. Albans. This, however, is probably a highly unreliable tale, because "amphibalus" is actually the name of a type of cloak, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, the first writer to mention this, seems not to have known that and to have treated the word as a personal name in more than one place. Prosaic readers will therefore assume that Geoffrey garbled the bit in the story about Alban wearing the priest's cloak for disguise. But we really mustn't be too cynical about Geoffrey -- he is, after all, also the original source for most of the romantic legends of King Arthur, and if we can't trust those, well, what can we trust?

So let us think of this shadowy priest as "St. Cloak," which is wonderfully suggestive. Because, after all, it's not really him that counts; it's his influence on Alban, and the cloak -- the image -- which Alban donned to take his place in legend. Was he some kind of hollow man, a garment more than a human being, a Late Roman Man in Black? If so, what was his purpose? Christianity was new in Britain, just as Roman power had been new in Britain in Boudica's time, and once again, the new power was tested and established via shedding of blood in Verulamium. It smacks unpleasantly of a repeated pattern of foundation sacrifice, while the flows of water which Alban supposedly stopped and then started transform the imagery into one of baptism. (Talking of beginnings in water, we may observe that St. Alban's feast day, the 22nd of June, is also the first day of Cancer.)

But with the realm established, Verulamium fades a little into the Dark Age mists -- for a while. Legend says that St. Germanus of Auxerre defeated the Pelagian heretics there in 429, but if so, it was a matter of peaceful debate (though Germanus *was* a militant sort of saint, not above leading his followers into battle). The shrine that marked Alban's place of martyrdom developed into a monastic church (a continuity of use rare in Britain), and stories say that St. Albans was where the tale of the [Wandering Jew](#) was first told in Europe (by an Armenian archbishop; don't ask what a foreign expert in such mysteries was doing in those parts). After the Norman Conquest, the new rulers demonstrated *their* power, less bloodily than their predecessors, by building a major abbey church. Its ruler became the premier abbot of England, and its chroniclers were famous historians of the realm. Blood sacrifice is replaced by a subtler rule over time as the main focus of the town's powers -- for a while.

Because modernity was coming, with ticking inevitability; by 1328, the abbey was under the (pendulum) sway of Abbot Richard of Wallingford, a blacksmith's son who'd made his way up in the world through the church. By this date, abbeys and cathedrals were just beginning to consider the advantages of owning a chiming clock to govern their offices, and the essential verge and foliot mechanism had been invented to make the idea work. And yet, when Abbot Richard decided that *his* abbey would know what time it was, he didn't use that idea; he used an idiosyncratic oscillating mechanism that was quite likely *better*. This is the earliest decently documented church clock in Europe. St. Albans was developing associations with originality and with time that would come back to bite the complacent.

The town produced the odd Famous Person along with the famous mechanism, and let's face it, they don't come very much odder or more original than [Sir John Mandeville](#). Well, at least, the likely best candidate for the role of author of the works of Sir John Mandeville was from these parts. (Authorship being slippery is another subject we'll come back to in a minute.) Sir John, it seems, left town and went off to meet his giant ants and practise medicine, but one does wonder what he had learned in youth, while being driven a little strange by the weirdly regular chiming of the town's high-tech masterpiece.

"Saint Albans' battle, won by famous York, Shall be eterniz'd in all age to come."
-- Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 2*

But if the clock was meant to stabilize things, and kicking Mandeville out was meant to keep things quiet, neither

worked quite perfectly. Blood flowed back. By the mid 15th century, England was in chaos, and St. Albans again became a battleground -- not just once, but twice. In 1455, the Lancastrian King Henry VI raised his standard in the town when Richard, Duke of York revolted against him, beginning the Wars of the Roses. Henry's choice of ground was perhaps unfortunate, in that the town was unwallled. (The old Roman defenses had long since decayed to the remnants nowadays visible in the town park.) After a flanking move and a short street fight, the more numerous Yorkists won, killing a couple of the Lancastrian leaders and taking control of the king.

By 1461, though, things got messy again, with Henry's wife Margaret d'Anjou doing a bit of a Boudica, carving up her Yorkist opponents in the north before marching on London. This time, it was the Yorkists who threw up improvised defenses, and the Lancastrians who launched a flanking maneuver through the town. The street fighting was heavy before the attackers won through and rolled up the defending lines.

Shortly after that, the town became the home of the first color printing press in England (more innovation). Then, under the Tudors, the ultimate victors in the Wars of the Roses, the abbey was dissolved, and its lands passed into the hands of the Bacon family. Thus, the town has a [Francis Bacon Number](#) of one, or less if that's possible; Bacon was, after all, Baron Verulam and Viscount St. Albans. By his time, British aristocrats didn't always spend much if any time in the places from which they took their titles, but Bacon was clearly serious about his, living a couple of miles away, at Gorbunbury, and allegedly conducting astronomical observations from a hill in Prae Wood, the location of the original Celtic settlement just outside the modern town.

This in turn has ensured St. Albans a place in Shakespeare Authorship Theory. Baconians like to point out that St. Albans rates several mentions in the Complete Works, whereas Stratford-on-Avon, home town of the obscure actor, doesn't rate any. (We won't dwell on the boring fact that some of those mentions are in the history plays, and relate to the battles in the Wars of the Roses, while others arise naturally from the fact that St. Albans is just outside London and on a major highway.) Things got more exciting for this school of thought in 1985.

*"The boar!" quoth she: whereat a sudden pale,
Like lawn being spread upon the blushing rose,
Usurps her cheek; she trembles at his tale . . ."*
-- Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*

In the course of some work that year, panelling was removed at the old White Hart Inn in St. Albans, revealing a great [Elizabethan wall painting](#) which appears to show the death-scene of Adonis from Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. Baconians jumped on this because it not only establishes a connection (of sorts) between Bacon and the poem, it appears to contain symbols related to Rosicrucianism -- and Bacon was *of course* the leader of the English Rosicrucians. And he had a boar as his crest (which sounds like a silly pun if you think about his name, but then, most heraldry turns out to be silly puns), and a boar kills Adonis, and . . .

The key symbol is the rose, which legendarily sprang from the body of the dead sun-god Adonis, who represents summer; oddly, though, in this picture, the only rose seems to be in the mouth of a horse. Whatever the Shakespearean aspects of all this, the sense of disrespect is surely suggestive; the boar in Bacon's crest represents winter, which kills the god. Baconians point out that the horsemen (representing Knights of the Rosy Cross?) are about to slay the boar (and are wielding -- Shaking? -- boar-spears accordingly), but that puts Bacon's heraldic animal firmly in the villainous, losing role. If this pub room was indeed a Rosicrucian meeting-place, as the theorists suggest, then were it and Bacon (the "wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind" according to Alexander Pope) at least partly dedicated to the powers of winter, blood, and unfortunate change?

Whatever. After Bacon's time, St. Albans slipped back to the fringes of history. In the English Civil War, it was the HQ of a Parliamentary army, but aside from a brief kerfuffle when the royalist High Sheriff was arrested by Cromwell himself, it for once managed to avoid becoming a battleground. In the 19th century, the great old abbey church became a cathedral and the town acquired a bishop. Meanwhile, like most British towns, it had exported its name to new worlds; specifically, to northwestern Vermont. A safe, innocuous location up by the Canadian border, you'd think; but a name entwined with civil war is surely a magnet for that bond- shattering, bloody phenomenon, and in 1864, Confederate troops, raiding out of Canada, came to the new St. Albans and plundered its banks. Not surprisingly, this

led to something of an international incident between the Union and Canada. It seems that the mere name is dangerous to hold.

In the century just past, struggles for the soul and name of the Bard aside, St. Albans has mostly got off lightly. Film director Stanley Kubrick lived not very far away for much of his life, but you probably won't find too many links to [2001](#). In fact, with the spread of the railways over the last couple of hundred years, St. Albans has been largely transformed into a dormitory-town for London. It has a few [stories of hauntings](#), especially around the Abbey; some of these relate to the saint or to the battles, but the ghostly lost music is unusually useful as these things go. Still, ghost stories are hardly rare in old towns, and frankly, one which nobody even bothers mentioning for 38 years is hardly in the big league.

But when push comes to RPG, that sort of quiet is what makes a place like St. Albans so useful. On the surface, there's not much special, but once PCs venture into the realm of symbols and mysteries, they find blood and war. The magical confusion of dual naming, suggested by the Bacon/Shakespeare issue, seems to be one key to the dark mystery of St. Albans. Ignore the prosaic spoilsporting of sensible scholars, who tell us that "Verulamium" comes from "Verlamion," the Celtic "settlement above the marsh," let alone the small River Ver running through the town. It's surely, really the Place of *Verus Lamia*, the True Serpent Witch, an old [Reptoid](#) center of power. Doubtless, the true masters of the world still lurk beneath its surface (perhaps below the Celtic ramparts in Prae Wood, where Bacon went, *thinking* that he was communing with the stars), twisting England's [Great Work of Time](#) to suit themselves and occasionally remaking the land in blood and war. And who would dare assume that they're finished yet?

(And the movie industry? Okay, that's a stretch, although there's a tenuous Kubrick link of sorts in there, too, if you dig. A film called *Birthday Girl* was being made a couple of years back, set in St. Albans. However, for various reasons which doubtless seemed logical to those involved, some of the shooting took place in a replica of the St. Albans house in question, specially built on a set in Australia. Since then, *Birthday Girl* has suffered a string of release delays . . . Perhaps even movie people shouldn't play with the magic of names.)

Heavily Skilled Today, Slightly Killed Tomorrow

This week is part three of our series of character power levels. (And by "our" I mean "mine, which you're forced to endure.") This week's discussion revolves around "Competent! I like characters that are human, but still more skilled than normal folks. (*X-Files*, *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Call of Cthulhu*)"

Hmm... I note now that I lumped in "*Dungeons & Dragons*" with this category; clearly this is what happens when I switch to Clorox ReadyMop cleaning solution instead of my usual hooch.

No, wait! I remember the reason I picked that. One of the debates among my group of friends in college was the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* character creation system. Or systems. In the 1st and 2nd Editions, there were many different ways to generate ability scores, which theoretically ranged in a bell curve from 3-18 (using 3d6) among the general population. (And, yes, that's a *real* bell curve, unlike the "Are you *sure* you have a college minor in Mathematics?!" bell curve I tried to pass off in last week's column.) But the general debate seemed to revolve around those systems that use 3d6 for PCs, versus those that use 4d6, drop the lowest.

Those that adhered to the former system believed that adventurers were just ordinary residents of the gaming world; they simply chose a different profession than the rest of the population. Thus they were equally likely to be above average as below average. Those that followed the latter system believe that adventurers were made of sterner stuff than that; those who decide to strap on an shield and muck about dungeons should, by their very nature, be above average in their abilities and stats, and thus less likely to die from a shaving cut than their 0-level brethren.

Anyway, the "skilled human" school likes the idea of playing someone closely tied to humanity, but still wants someone more skilled than the average schlub on the street. Perhaps this stems from a realistic wish fulfillment:

- "I could have joined the Air Force, if I didn't need glasses."
- "I could have been an FBI agent, if I had done better in college."
- "I could be a skilled martial artist, if I were in better shape and willing to work real hard."

Perhaps it's merely a desire to have a character that will live longer in the game world, while still being challenged.

Regardless, it's easy to envision these characters as human, because they are. While it's difficult to picture the Batman's alter-ego Bruce Wayne -- pinnacle of human accomplishment -- sitting at home eating a bag of chips watching *The Sopranos*, it's quite easy to envision an intelligent university professor who raises guinea pigs and is shy around women. Or a highly skilled marine who dreams of being a movie star and desperately wants to quit smoking. Or a CIA agent with acrophobia and a gift for languages. Although all of these characters possess abilities that sets them apart from most of humanity, they're still easy to identify with; it's easy to picture ourselves as friends with them, or disliking them in a bar, or asking them on a date. While playing Kurt Stock, Superagent of FREEDOM, can carry a lot of personal responsibility ("Wow. Kurt Stock was thwarted by Girl Scouts because you rolled really badly . . ."), playing a random NSA agent that gets tangled up in a web of Cthulhuan horror affords more freedom. He has the skills to get out of (and into!) trouble, yet there's no particular shame if the character isn't up to the task.

So presuming you want to play a skilled human, what are some things to keep in mind?

- How you got your skills is quite possibly more important than what your skills are. Most skilled people acquired

How powerful do you like your characters to be in RPGs you play in, compared to the rest of the populace?

Gods among men! I like really powerful characters. (Four-Colored Supers, High Magic, <i>In Nomine</i>)	2%
Powerful! I like characters with abilities far different from normal people. (<i>Vampire</i> , <i>Mage</i> , Jedi)	8%
Highly competent! I like characters that are still human, but incredibly skilled. (Batman, James Bond, <i>Black Ops</i>)	13%
Competent! I like characters that are human, but still more skilled than normal folks. (<i>X-Files</i>, <i>Dungeons & Dragons</i>, <i>Call of Cthulhu</i>)	33%
Normal! I like my characters human. (some <i>Traveller</i> games)	4%
Men among gods! I like playing weak characters among very strong forces. (<i>Bunnies & Burrows</i>)	0%
It depends. I like playing lots of different power levels.	36%
Dude! I don't roleplay!	0%

their abilities through one particular set of circumstances (police training, a tour of duty on a nuclear submarine, apprenticing to a fletcher); those circumstances will generally shape the life. For example, agents of the KGB and CIA may well have similar skill sets, the methodology and philosophies of each will probably be quite different. Likewise a doctor who interned at Johns Hopkins University will have a different view than one who trained in a South American field hospital.

- Most skilled humans are more acutely aware of the boundaries and limitations of their abilities. It's almost unheard of to see the typical cinematic action star ever doubt his abilities; the acrobatic hero doesn't give a second thought to leaping across an impossible chasm, the martial artist hero doesn't flinch at the army of curiously unarmed soldiers, and the scientific hero takes a few minutes to interface his Mac laptop with the alien computer.

In more realistic stories with less-skilled heroes, on the other hand, it's quite common for characters to sum up the circumstances and say (correctly), "Hmm . . . nope; I can't do this." And then they'll run away, pass the buck onto someone else, or try to come up with an alternate solution.

To this end, it can be useful in these games that focus on skilled humans to have a clear understanding of what the character can (and cannot) realistically accomplish within the game system. While this doesn't require a detailed spreadsheet and hours of number-crunching, having at least a vague idea of the limits of the character's skills will more accurately reflect the genre. A talented writer knows whether he has a shot at completing a 20,000-word assignment in a week, a good programmer knows if he can do a challenging assignment, and a professional criminal should be able to assess whether or not he can break into a building and retrieve an item of value. (If need be, it can be appropriate in these games for the GM to inform the player if his character believes he's up to the task . . . better hope you didn't take that Overconfident disadvantage!) Now, it's obviously in keeping with many genres for there to be unexpected complications that affect the outcome of these tasks . . . but for normal skilled folks, knowing that something is impossible is arguably a *more* useful ability than thinking you might be able to do something in the first place.

- Finally, skilled-but-still-human heroes often have the best excuses to *be* adventurers, at least realistically; although we don't have any real-life examples of a James Bond or a Doc Savage, we *do* have plenty of examples of above-average skilled people doing extraordinary things: rescuing people out of burning buildings, performing heroic deeds behind enemy lines, or eloquently persuading an armed gunman to give up his hostages. These are the kind of people that generally make the evening news; the superspies, if they exist, are being kept secret by their governments. Skilled people are the most likely to be caught up in plots (grandiose or otherwise); they may not be the best person for the job, but they're the closest and most available . . . and with a little luck, they'll be just what the world needs.

Skilled folks allow perhaps the best of two worlds; you get all the advantages and freedoms of playing a "[regular](#)" person, while still getting a few more toys to play with. In all games -- from fantasy to space, from highly cinematic to highly realistic -- skilled normals should have a happy home. Until they're eaten by Cthulhu.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Burning Shaolin** (for **Feng Shui/d20**), p. 24.*

(Three stars) "Computers designate themselves with a telepathically transmitted binary designator -- 10100111010100100101111, for instance. Other races have so far had no occasion to need names for the Computers."

The Permanent Record

by Alice Turov

"Senator, I just have a few more questions."

"Of course. I'm always happy to answer questions for such a . . ." Senator Miller raised his eyebrows and smiled an overly broad grin at Kelly Tavis. She hid the shudder, as he continued. "Pretty young thing as yourself."

"Is it true you were once arrested on a vandalism charge in your sophomore year of high school?"

*The clearing of his throat was the only betrayal of emotion. "I must say, you are quite a journalist. **Quite** a journalist. Yes, in fact, I confess that I had a minor indiscretion in my youthful days. But I like to think that I've learned from my mistakes. There **is** a reason we keep those records sealed, Ms. Tavis."*

"Of course, Senator. I understand. Now, back in your college days you had a roommate named Charles Camore, correct?"

"Yes, it's a shame . . . he disappeared in the middle of my junior year. No one knows what happened to him."

"You were sleeping with his girlfriend at the time, correct?"

Miller's eyes narrowed. "I don't know how you know this, but . . ."

"And are you familiar with a hidden cache in the fifth floor men's bathroom of your old law library? It was sealed over shortly after you left . . . it seems that would be the perfect place to hide, say . . . a gun."

He leaned in close, snatching the recorder out of her hand and crushing it in a fluid motion. "You may have found the gun," he hissed, "But you'll never leave here alive. You've just signed your own death warrant."

Tavis leaned forward slightly herself, arcing an eyebrow. "Really? I'm guessing that only one of us has a wire taped to our chest."

And then the police kicked down the door.

It is the threat of countless teachers and parents alike: "If you aren't careful, this will go down on your permanent record."

In fact, the permanent record *does* exist. And it truly can come back to haunt the subject.

The Permanent Record

At its core, the Permanent Record is a collection of facts about the subject. At the very least, it contains information that would be collected by mundane government and supervisory authorities: school records, police files (including juvenile records), driving information, tax returns, census forms, international legal documents, and the like. Unlike any of those other singular sources, however, the data is all in one place; acquiring someone's Permanent Record will

provide not only unparalleled depth, but also breadth. Thus in a skilled data analyst's hands it could be possible to determine how much money someone claimed to have in college, how many people were living in his household at the time of the last census, whether he has ever been arrested, and so on.

The Permanent Record may contain more information. For example, it might compile *all* traceable information regarding the subject: all purchases made with a check or credit card, all bank transactions, all library withdrawals, any mentions made of the person in the media, and so on. Thus it may be possible to analyze the data and discern that the CEO of a powerful company purchased weekend tickets for an opera, bought lingerie at an upscale boutique on the other side of town, withdrew a large sum of additional money, and rented a car . . . he is probably having an affair, and bought opera tickets as an alibi; with knowledge of the mileage from the rented car (which this Permanent Record would have), it should be possible to establish a probable city he went to.

The Permanent Record may contain even *more* information. The Permanent Record might contain *all* observable data on the person: information on where the subject has been, what he has done, what he has purchased, who he has spoken to, what he has said, and so on. Such a Record would be a useful, but boring read: "Subject parks his car outside the Laundromat at 11:44. Subject opens the trunk. Subject rummages through the trunk. Subject picks up a tire iron at 11:45. Subject places the tire iron against the left side of the car. Subject walks up to the Laundromat. Subject opens the door. Subject (11:46): 'Hey, Lou! Can I talk to you outside for a minute?' Subject accompanies large white man to the left side of the car. Subject picks up the tire iron at 11:47. Subject strikes the man seventeen times, from 11:47-11:50. . . ." Such a Record would read like a detached prisoner log sheet (which may be more accurate than it is comfortable to consider).

Finally, the Permanent Record might contain *all* information: anything the subject has ever done; anything he has ever thought; his motivations, hopes, and dreams.

Limitations of the Permanent Record

Even at its weakest level, the Permanent Record is an *incredibly* vast storehouse of information, which can be useful in the right hands, and almost certainly dangerous in the wrong ones. But the Record does have limitations. Probably primary is that it's fairly disorganized. In pre-21st century modern games, the Permanent Record is a paper file; it consists merely of a printout copy of the actual files the component departments have (or, in the case of more omniscient Permanent Records, information in a consistent but inflexible format . . . for example, all thoughts of the subject in chronological order). Thus it would be possible to investigate the subject's driving record, or his prep school records, or the like, but it would be impossible to determine at a glance what his grades were like in high school the same year he was arrested for misdemeanor drug charges. (Such data *could* be analyzed and extrapolated, of course, but there's no index or cross-referencing to make such an investigation easy.)

In modern and near-future games, the Permanent Record probably exists electronically. Unfortunately, again all the pieces are mere data dumps of their components; although it *should* be possible to integrate them into a seamless whole, the amount of effort that would require would be astronomical, and would probably require more work than would be worthwhile for any but the most powerful -- or careful -- of subjects.

Given the amount of information that may be in the Permanent Record, size may well also be a problem. At its lowest levels a pre-modern Permanent Record may consist of an overstuffed folder barely held together with a straining rubber band. At mid-levels it would probably be several large file boxes, and at the highest levels the Permanent Record may be a giant room of file cabinets! Obviously the depth of knowledge possible in the Permanent Record can easily be eclipsed by the need to sort through so much data . . . if you're only interested in the subject's college admissions essay, it's probably easier to use mundane means to acquire it than it is to sift through a mountain of files.

The Permanent Record also has a problem that much of its data cannot be directly used; most American courts of law, for example, probably would not allow such evidence to be used directly because of privacy protections provided by the penumbra of the Constitution. And even if they *can* find a way to work it into the system, can they do so without arousing suspicion (especially if the heroes are not supposed to have access to the Records in the first place)? This may present a sticky situation for heroes; how do they effectively *use* this source of knowledge? Several gaming

scenes (or whole sessions!) can revolve around trying to "legitimize" the information contained in the Permanent Record.

The Permanent Record In The Campaign

The Permanent Record can begin on the outskirts of realistic at its least powerful, and escalate to the unbelievably cinematic at its most. This can range from goofy ("Here at the Department of Kyle Fennis, we're devoted to investigating . . . well, Kyle Fennis.") to the deadly serious ("The Greys have been investigating all of us. All of our transactions, interactions, movements, all of our *thoughts* . . . here, Jack. This datadisc contains *your* record.").

The Permanent Record is probably most useful as a *deus ex machina* for otherwise unobtainable data; if the PCs have *really* good contacts, they should be able to acquire someone's Permanent Record. Of course, the mere existence of such a thing may well give privacy-minded heroes significant pause; if they are able to access a Permanent Record for their ends, then Permanent Records almost certainly exist for *them*.

Which is, of course, another fine use for the Permanent Record. If you ever need antagonists to have information about the heroes, it may be possible that they have their Permanent Records. (They may even be in *control* of them.) How do the villains always know where the good guys are? How are they able to strike out at the heroes' secret identities? The Permanent Record.

Given the extreme possibility for abuse of the Permanent Record, it is likely that the GM will wish to limit it to one or two appearances, or otherwise keep its scope from being too disruptive. Perhaps the Permanent Record only stretches back to a certain time chronologically (when the files were first created); if the heroes wish to learn anything before, say, 1984, they'll need to do regular investigative work. Perhaps there is literally only one copy of any given Permanent Record; an inopportune fire could destroy thousands (or millions!) of people's files. Although the data does still exist (at least in the lower-level Permanent Records), recompiling it would be highly problematic. Perhaps the Permanent Record takes time to acquire, making it a useful long-term or last-gasp solution, but a miserable first-tier answer. Perhaps the mere usage of the Permanent Record draws attention to the entire project, leading to its eventual exposure and the inevitable shutdown.

Adventure Seeds

- The adventurers find evidence that the facilities for the Permanent Record exist. The keepers of the records swear they aren't using them for any sinister purposes, and even want to permit the heroes access to this trove of information. Can they resist the bite of the fruit of the tree of knowledge?
- The heroes *find* someone's Permanent Record. With it, they could destroy the person . . . or, at the very least, make his life miserable. Given this kind of temptation, can the heroes resist? What if he's amorally powerful, and would be a useful pawn? What if he's obviously a criminal, and this Permanent Record provides enough pieces to finally finish him? What if the heroes found the Record in the headquarters of a master villain, with evidence that he had been using it to control him . . . are the heroes willing to use the Record to try to sway the person to be under their control (or at least determine if the foul acts listed in the Record are his own actions, or the result of the master villain)?
- One of the PCs discovered (or is mailed!) a copy of his *own* Permanent Record . . . with evidence that it has been recently copied. Even worse, a casual glance shows that the information isn't entirely accurate (at least, that's what the hero claims . . . although can you *really* trust someone who spent six months doing hard time in a Guatemalan prison camp?). Who has his file? For what purpose? And why is it incorrect (or why has it been modified)?

Like Unto Gods

Really High Tech Levels for GURPS

by Dmitri Scull

If one is playing a high Ultra-Tech level campaign (even one as low as TL 12-13) one sometimes run into the problem that many of the "Precursor Artifacts" that are out there are not particularly that far advanced from the campaign tech level; in higher tech level campaigns, the potential for such advanced civilizations is even further curtailed; no guidelines exist for tech levels above 16, and TL 16 is only lightly detailed.

The reasons for this are fairly obvious; at such high tech levels, physical threats tend to fade; if one can build infinity rooms and full conversion power plants, what kind of dangers must one face to provide a challenge? "A rogue black hole? <yawn> Throw up the gravitic repulsors, and don't wake me again unless there is a *real* emergency."

Of course, not all campaigns focus on "killing the bad guys," and a political campaign at high tech levels can be quite rewarding, especially if everyone is at an appropriately high tech level. If a truly high level Precursor device enters the scene, the race to acquire the device can be several adventures; the struggle to keep it can become the focus of an entire campaign.

This article presents an example at what these incredibly high tech levels (ascendant tech levels, as they lead towards racial "ascension" into a higher level of being, much like the auroras of *GURPS Aliens*) might look like. Some of these devices might (possibly) fit into lower tech levels, assuming that there is a "shortcut" to the technology that allows its creation; the tech levels were set assuming a "hard" science fiction background.

Note also that costs are not given for any of these technologies; it is assumed that they will either be rare (and priceless) Precursor devices, or that they will be in a society that has gone beyond the concept of money (the ability to create gold at will has that effect).

TL16: Total Conversion

Tech level 16 is covered in the *GURPS Ultra-Tech* sourcebooks, but the full ramifications of matter-energy conversion are only lightly covered. In addition to nearly infinite power supply from random matter, energy can be converted into matter. This is what allows teleportation. At TL16, teleportation is STL, so it is mostly used for in-system travel.

A side effect of teleportation is the Chrysalis Field; like a Chrysalis Device, this destroys harmful micro-organisms and repairs damage; unlike a Chrysalis Device, this is an instantaneous walk-through field that is often fitted to airlocks or included as part of a teleportation chamber.

Similar to this is the Genie Device. These simple energy-matter conversion auto-factories create matter -- in any shape or form, including cooked food -- on demand. No need for time-consuming nano-bot construction any more. Anything that can be designed can be created (most come with simple AI CAD programs, to assist in unusual requests).

At the ultimate end of this scale, planets can be created from raw energy, and can even be programmed with the patterns for plant and animal life. However, at this tech level, this is an experimental technology and demands much energy, which means only simple (ordinary) planets can be created.

TL17: Unlimited Miniaturization

At TL17, space-time is man's plaything. Through such manipulations, sub-atomic nano-bots (called quark-bots) can be created; at this size, these creations can subtly change some of the laws of physics. Two of the most common types of quark-bots are Ghost-Bots and Aegis-Bots. Ghost-Bots alter the atomic structure/vibration of their subject (or host), so that physical matter and energy will pass through without interacting, effectively rendering the subject insubstantial. They leave the soles of the subject's feet substantial so that they won't sink into the ground; some, however, have been programmed as assassins without this safeguard. "Ghost Bullets" are slugs with Ghost-Bots in them; they become solid inside their target, and have a damage multiplier of $\times 2$. They ignore armor. At TL18, "Ghost Beams" with double the normal damage multiplier become available; they also ignore armor.

Aegis-Bots are almost the reverse of Ghost-Bots. Rather than make their subject (or host) insubstantial, they "harden" space-time around the subject, rendering them impervious to normal matter and energy ("ghosted" matter and energy can still affect them, as can TL18 temporal disruptors and TL19 uncreation beams). Aegis-Bots are often used to enhance starship hulls and armor.

Boosted by this new miniaturization technology, Codebreakers are now available; these are pills, slugs, or energy fields (depending on the design) that analyze the target's genetic code and rebuilds it for a specific purpose. The subject is then instantly transformed to make use of the new genetic data. This is often used for the elimination of unwanted traits, addition of new traits, or the creation of tailored species to fit the environment. Because of their analytical properties, Codebreakers can be used on any species.

Teleportation technology now employs space-time compression to shorten distances, allowing them to travel interstellar distances at FTL speed; this also allows time travel. If not already available, both warp engines and jump engines are now available as means of FTL travel. Artificial jump gates can also be made. These still require teleportation booths and similar large devices; however, for in-system STL teleportation, Personal Teleporters, the size of a watch or pocket calculator (and getting smaller as the tech level progresses) are available.

If actual travel to a new location or time is not desirable, one can instead scan the area or time, creating a one-way "ripple" in space-time that allows the subject to see through to the new location.

As another "minor" breakthrough, time travel has the side effect of creating the Lazarus Device. This scans the remains of a subject, locates the subject just before death, and rebuilds them in the present, effectively bringing them back from death . . . even if they have been dead for years or centuries.

TL16 planet-building technology is now mature; in seconds, any planet -- including ring-worlds and Dyson spheres -- can be built from raw energy. Custom planets, such as ones of uniform construction (made of gold, for instance) are similarly possible.

TL18: Tomorrow is Yesterday

Time modification technology comes into its own in TL18. Whereas TL17 time-porters were large booths, TL18 time travelers make do with devices much like watches or calculators. Interstellar teleporters have similarly shrunk, and many such devices include both features.

New levels of teleportation are possible; it is now possible to teleport intergalactic distances (and scan at such distances as well). This opens new frontiers, since below TL18 it is difficult to travel between galaxies.

TL18 medicine is simple; the subject takes a Lazarus pill. This essentially gives the Advantages of Instant Regeneration (at double speed), Regrowth, and Resurrection (with no loss of character points) until the quark-bots that the character has ingested are destroyed . . . not an easy task in and of itself.

The field of weaponry has a new toy with the temporal disruptor. This device shatters atomic bonds by rapidly aging and rejuvenating adjacent atoms in the area. When designing temporal disruptors (using the rules in *GURPS Vehicles*) calculate damage and power requirement as a disintegrator, and calculate the remaining characteristics (including range in vacuum) as a laser; although its base TL is 18 in all cases.

With the advent of the temporal disruptor comes temporal shielding. A device treated with the temporal shielding quark-bots has double its normal armor against a temporal disruptor (which does not get its armor divisor). It also cannot be time-ported or teleported.

TL18 also sees the ultimate in macro-scalar design technologies: the Starseed, which will create a new main-sequence star (type and magnitude are up to the designer). Technically, a Starseed can be made to create just about any type of star, including dwarf stars, neutron stars, variable stars, and black holes, but those are mainly the toys of research scientists; main sequence Starseeds are used to create new solar systems for colonization. They require a lot of energy, however, and do not usually become tremendously widespread until TL19.

TL19: Let There Be Light

Tech level 19 sees two major breakthroughs. The first is DimTech, or dimensional technology, which gives access to alternate realities. This creates dim-porters, which are usually built into personal time-porters (which themselves are now capable of intergalactic teleports as well). Such devices are also capable of scanning the new reality, and analyzing it quickly to determine major differences. A detailed survey, which can determine even minor and subtle differences, might take as much as a full day.

With the advent of DimTech, hyperspace technology becomes available (if it were not available sooner), offering the full range of FTL options.

The second major breakthrough of TL19 is energy/matter genesis. This technique uses quark-bots to "weaken" reality barriers until matter or energy is created from nothingness (like a tiny Big Bang). This renders power plants obsolete, as the major use of this is to create self-powering circuits. This eliminates the need for power cells, power plants, and anything at else to generate power, as the self-powering circuit generates a small surplus (enough to handle any foreseeable contingency) of energy . . . forever.

A new type of Genie Device, the Unending Clip, makes slug-throwers never run out of ammo. Unending Clips are usually not removable (raising reliability one step). Build an Unending Clip using the normal clip rules, but it need only hold enough rounds for a single turn (3 in the case of 3~ weapons).

The reversal of the genesis technology is the uncreation beam. This device manipulates the fabric of reality so that the target ceases to exist. Build uncreation beams as if they were displacers, but with 100 times range and at 1/100 the weight. Uncreation beams leave no traces to be brought back using normal Lazarus technologies (although one could scan back with the standard time-porter and use that data to recreate the target).

TL20: Ascendance

Tech level 20 is marked by really only a single technology: the Transcendence Device. This has one main effect: it effectively turns a physical being into a Being of Pure Thought (see *GURPS Psionics* for more information). At this level, the race has transcended the need for physical technologies and has become an advanced race, such as the auroras (from *GURPS Aliens*).

As a side effect, any limitations on psionics -- such as taboo powers or skills, required Disadvantages, or racial limits -- is waived for the TL20 culture, even if they choose not to become Beings of Pure Thought. Similarly, raised IQ and Mental Advantages can easily be gained, even after character creation.

As a campaign plot device, the race to TL20 and the Transcendence Device is a powerful story, especially if two warring factions are struggling to obtain the technology. This can be done several ways for dramatic effect. The players could be from one of the two races, with some third party serving as a mediator. Perhaps it truly is a race, to see who is worthy and develops the technology first (or a test, and they can only succeed if they work together). Another possibility is that the players are from a third, less advanced race, whose fate will be determined by which race transcends first.

TL21+: A Sufficiently Advanced Technology

At such advanced tech levels, "technology" is usually no longer physical in nature. Such technology now takes the form of energy constructs; these energy constructs are simple patterns (often taking the form of songs or gestures) that create a specific effect.

Anyone can learn how to use an energy construct, once he or she has been introduced to it; most such constructs are Mental/Hard skills, while some are Mental/Very Hard. Eidetic Memory does not help much, adding only +1 or +2 to the roll.

In other words, such energy constructs function exactly like the spells from *GURPS Magic* and *GURPS Grimoire*, although Magical Aptitude is not required as the energy constructs do not function through mana (although the GM can change this, or allow the bonus for Magical Aptitude even if they do not work through mana, due to the familiarity the mage would have with the concept). *GURPS Magic* and *GURPS Grimoire* are recommended as sources for energy constructs.

Most of the spells from *GURPS Magic* and *GURPS Grimoire* should be TL21 energy constructs; for higher tech level energy constructs, the GM should limit himself to the more dramatic spells or create new, more powerful, and far-reaching spells.

Slave to the System

For *Transhuman Space*

by James P. Barrett

"Mr. Speaker, I believe that the honorable gentleman is allowing his judgment in this issue to be clouded by concerns other than those at hand. How is it that we may choose to allow our fellow Sapient beings to exist in states of institutionalized slavery and servitude, in practice if not in name, simply because they say that they wish to? Do we leave children in the care of abusive or incompetent parents simply because the child asks it? Do we permit a person to lie about their actions in court to protect another and take their word as true simply because they state it? No, Mr. Speaker, we do not, and I cannot but believe that in this case we must stand up for the rights of those who are unable to stand up for themselves by dint of their very upbringing, which, Mr. Speaker, can barely be considered an upbringing at all, but rather training for a life in servitude, indeed I cannot see that we have any choice in this matter . . ."

--*The Honorable Victor Rutherford Jnr. MP*
12th September 2095

Ingredients

Introduction

This adventure is intended for use in the *Transhuman Space* setting, however with modification it could work in other settings easily.

It is assumed that the PCs will be the crew of an ESDV-90, the *HMS Restitution*; however it would be very easy to use another EU vessel. The *Restitution* is on a standard patrol duty intended to show a military presence in the Main Belt and prevent the incidents of piracy which occur in the area.

The Craft

While almost 0.2AU (10 light seconds) from Aletheia Station, a faint radio signal is detected. The signal repeats in a loop, each cycle fainter than the previous, identifying itself as the USAF-Training Vehicle *Pride of Guam*, indicating that it has suffered systems failure, and detailing its current course. The course correction required in order to intercept it is only minor, and the *Restitution* easily performs the maneuver.

The Crew

Upon reaching the craft, the crew discovers a small vessel intended for training, carrying a crew compliment of four, one instructor and three students. The systems throughout the craft have failed, including its engines, sensors, and life support. Inside the CO₂ concentration has reached poisonous levels (although characters with the Andraste biomod could survive, unconsciousness would result). On the bridge the crew are still manning their positions, wearing vacc suits, all of which have exhausted their air-supplies. The Instructor is dead, however examination shows that the three trainees are merely unconscious. A rudimentary observation also shows that they are combat bioroids.

The Rescue

Shortly after the *Restitution* takes on-board the survivors from the *Pride of Guam* and heads back to continue its journey, another vessel -- the USAF SDV *Johab* -- is detected by the forward PESA, also responding to the distress signal. (Although no statistics have yet been published for a USAF SDV, the GM can design one using the TS rules, or use EDSV-90 statistics; most SDVs are fairly similar to one another.)

Upon discovering that the crew have already been evacuated (either via radio, or by docking with the *Pride of Guam*) the *Johab* will match course and speed with the *Restitution*, and the Commander will politely request that the bioroids be returned. If they are not, then it will be explained that they still owe the US government several years more service before their debt is repayed. If they are still not returned, the *Johab* folds its radiator wings and uncovers its Laser Irises.

Cooking Tips

A Battle of Principles

It is important to remember that the EU regards all forms of indentured servitude as institutionalized slavery. European law is very clear on the fact that bioroids (and, indeed, sapient AIs) shall not be returned to the nation of their origin by agents of the European Commission, including officers of the various space forces. If the PCs don't recall this fact, it might be advised to have the ship's computer remind them that returning the American crew persons would be illegal under the Emancipation (Artificial Aliens) Act of 2095.

(Note from David Pulver: "No such act is listed in the setting, but it's a reasonable extrapolation of the EU attitude.")

The Freedom of Choice

The matter can be complicated further if the crew persons recover before, or during, the encounter with the *Johab*. Extremely patriotic, the three bioroids will happily work and assist their allies up until it becomes clear that they will not be returned to their own people; at that point they will attempt to escape. Very likely they will try anything in order to get back on-board a US vessel, up to and including murder, unless specifically ordered not to by a superior (American) Officer; this may be unlikely, but see below.

Perhaps this will cause the heroes to question whether they should be returned; after all, can it be slavery if they would rather die than be prevented from serving their nation?

International Incident

In the asteroid belt, it would take messages half an hour to make a round trip to Earth or Mars. As a result, captains are given authority. The US captain is ordered to retrieve the bioroids by any means short of fire on the *Restitution* itself (except in self defense) but he is not going to reveal that to the EU captain and may bluff where needed, or use his embarked Predator robot fighters to fake close approach attacks; the *Restitutions'* captain has a 100 seconds lag (one space combat turn) between each transmission and response) to Aletheia, but the local commander there will leave him to act on his own initiative, as he can best judge the situation.

For this reason the tension of the situation should be played up as much as possible. Both sides should attempt to set an ultimatum, and each should match the moves and preparations of the other as they try to stare each other out. (This situation will vary, of course, depending on how close reinforcements are . . .)

Extra Spice?

Perhaps there's something unusual about these bioroids, perhaps a new model, or maybe something more sinister. Why would trainee bioroid soldiers be educated this far out in the belt? Why would they be fitted with Andraste modifications? Are they USAF special ops team being prepared for an operation on Mars? Perhaps their loyalty is inspired by more than memetically designed upbringing and education, maybe they are the experimental subjects of new mind altering techniques.

Or perhaps it's the *Pride of Guam* itself that's unusual. Maybe the training flight was investigating the properties of new propulsion or navigation systems which failed. Possibly it's this far out because of the experimental use of Antimatter Torch, or even more exotic drive technologies. Or could the *Restitution* be the one on a new technologies proving flight?

As presented here the *Restitution* and the *Johab* are pretty evenly matched, but that needn't be the case. The HMS *Restitution* can easily be replaced with a rundown older model on its last patrol before scrapping, or with a civilian vessel out in this area for scientific purposes. Alternatively the *Johab* could be downgraded, or battle damaged. If it is then it will create even more worries for the crew of the *Restitution*. After all, who could it have been fighting?

Lastly, it is possible that whatever caused the failure of the *Pride of Guam* is still around, a computer virus or microbot infection which is now beginning to weaken the *Restitution*, best to hope that the Americans don't find out.

Side Salad

There are a number of additional factors in this setup of which further use could be made. The *Pride of Guam* may well contain things other than the military bioroids, including code books, guidance systems, or even tactical AIs. The bioroids themselves may well be more of a handful than presented here, since as dedicated killing machines they should be capable of overcoming any normal cell. Most EU (and other) SDVs however would be equipped with heavy duty holding brigs or "smart blindfolds" for the storage of powerful transhumans, but these may get damaged. Alternatively, some bioroids may have "flesh pocket" implants that contain concealed weapons.

The instructor who was in charge of the *Pride of Guam* is also a possible source of complication, especially if he's found to have been carrying a Chinese (or TSA) Intelligence Code disk.

The Sharp-Edged Man

by James L. Cambias

The Sharp-Edged Man

240 points

Age indeterminate, 6'6" tall, 280 lbs. The Sharp-Edged Man is a slim, graceful humanoid made entirely of blades. His fingers are knives, his hair is needles, his nose a hatchet blade, and his teeth are delicate scalpels. Even the edges of his arms and the point of his chin are bladed. Under his barbed brows, his eyes are red and sardonic.

ST 14 [45], **DX** 14/7 [45], **IQ** 10, **HT** 16 [80]

Speed: 7.5, Move: 6

Dodge: 7, Parry: 13 (Brawling), 8 (Missile Parry), Block: 6

Advantages: Body of Metal-6 (Always On, -20%) [43], Claws (long talons) [55], Combat Reflexes [15], Spines (short) [5], Sharp Teeth [5], Strong Will (+1) [4].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous) [-25], Bully [-10], Dead Broke [-25], Poor Grip [-5], Reduced Manual Dexterity (-7) [-21], Sadism [-15], Sterile [-3].

Quirks: Constantly sharpens himself, stands too close, taunts enemies, cuts up everything within reach [-4].

Skills: Brawling-20 [32], Climbing-14 [2], Intimidation-13 [7], Parry Missile Weapons-14 [4], Running-16 [4], Stealth-14 [2].

Languages: English* (Native)-10 [0]. *or whatever language is most common in the campaign setting.

Equipment: The Sharp-Edged Man carries no equipment and disdains the use of tools or weapons.

Background

The Sharp-Edged Man's background depends on the campaign setting. He can be anything from a demon to a cyborg.

Fantasy

In a fantasy setting the Sharp-Edged Man is the product of enchantment, possibly cursed with his bladed appearance as punishment for his cruelty. The Sharp-Edged Man is an excellent monster, particularly suitable as a wizard's guardian or a magical warrior; he can take on a whole party of low-powered characters or go one-on-one with a mighty hero. Lower his IQ to 8 and add the Unliving disadvantage to make the Sharp-Edged Man into a "Knife Golem." An army of Sharp-Edged Men would be suitable troops for a powerful Dark Lord unstoppable except by some ancient magic.

Supers

In a superheroic campaign the Sharp-Edged Man could be a minor supervillain, or one of a squad of bladed goons in the service of a mastermind. His body is either the result of surgical alteration, or else caused by accidental exposure to radiation or chemicals. To make him a more powerful enemy for high-point superheroes, increase his Body of Metal advantage to level 18, which gives him major armor protection, and give his shiny body extra DR against lasers and light-based attacks. His claws could be made Armor-Piercing or poisoned.

Science Fiction

In a futuristic setting the Sharp-Edged Man could either be a case of total cyborgization, or else a custom-built android. He isn't really very useful as a future soldier, but would be an intimidating bodyguard or a very showy gladiator in televised arena battles. Remove the Sterile disadvantage and the Sharp-Edged Man might be a member of

an alien species.

Horror

In a horror campaign the Sharp-Edged Man could be a demonic being or a vengeful ghost, or the product of Weird Science gone amok. Give him some way of coming and going secretly (either some sort of teleportation ability, or else shapeshifting or illusions to hide his true appearance), and he becomes a perfect stalking horror. Replace Bully with Bloodlust to make him a cunning, lethal foe. As a supernatural being he might have Magical Aptitude and some spells (appropriate ones include spells to cause pain and fear, metal-control spells, and possibly Gate or Planar Visit).

Motivations

The Sharp-Edged Man's chief motivation is a desire to cause harm. He likes to cut people, and if he can't cut them he will terrorize them. If that doesn't work he will at least try to hurt their feelings with cutting remarks. When there aren't people around to hurt he hurts animals, and failing that he randomly slashes up furniture, snips at shrubbery, and makes deep scratches in woodwork. If employed as a guardian or a soldier by someone, the Sharp-Edged Man grudgingly follows orders, but tries to cause as much random destruction as possible within the letter of his instructions.

He is a living being, and needs to breathe, sleep, and eat. The Sharp-Edged Man only eats meat, raw by preference, and takes pleasure in killing his own dinner . . . or slicing off bits to eat while the beast is still alive. He is rather vain about his appearance, taking pains to keep himself polished and free of corrosion.

Encountered

When encountered, the Sharp-Edged Man is cruel and threatening, using his Intimidation skill and fearsome appearance to overawe opponents. Often he will inflict painful cuts on the weakest-looking person in a group in order to intimidate the others.

In battle the Sharp-Edged Man is devastating at close range (he can kill a human with one slash of his claws), but he is vulnerable to long-range weapons. A crossbow or thrown spear can punch through his steel skin, and a few gunshots will put him down. His standard tactic is to rush at his enemies, closing the distance quickly with his Running skill, which increases his movement rate to 8. His first targets are bowmen or spellcasters (if mages are common in the campaign setting and easily recognizable). Against armored enemies the Sharp-Edged Man uses his high Brawling skill to make an all-out attack against vulnerable spots like the face or the eyes. If his opponents have guns, he avoids direct combat, preferring to strike from stealth and reduce the party one by one.

His metallic body has PD2, DR6, but is vulnerable to sonic or vibratory attacks. In hand-to-hand combat he does 1d+4 impaling damage with a thrust, or 2d+4 cutting damage with a swing. Anyone wrestling with the Sharp-Edged Man or trying to grapple him takes 1d-2 impaling damage from his spines and sharp edges.

The Sharp-Edged Man's chief weakness is the clumsiness of his taloned fingers. He cannot easily pick things up without shredding them, and the blades are a serious hindrance to fine work. Often it is easier for the Sharp-Edged Man to hack through a door than try to turn a knob. In most societies his appearance causes terror and alarm, so he must either live in hiding or take service with a patron.

Pyramid Review

Laws of the Hunt (for Mind's Eye Theatre)

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)



Developed by Cynthia Summers

314 pages; \$19.95

Things that go bump in the night, strange creatures that live out in the woods, and corpses that walk under moonlight are the foes encountered in Mind Eye Theatre's *Laws of the Hunt*. This book has a great concept: an ordinary mortal out to get the creatures of the night for one of a host of reasons. Everything from revenge to curiosity gives you the strength to carry on.

This book has a huge volume of information; while entertaining, it seems to detract from the purpose and confuse the reader, both at the same time! You hunt the supernatural . . . sounds simple enough. What makes the purpose confusing? Numinae, or human magic, is a tool in the arsenal of most hunters . . . or rather *will* be, since they are offered in the book, and few storytellers can hold off the players for long. Therefore, you have magic; you hunt those who are not mortal, but you yourself have abilities that place you beyond mortals. Well, it can be the source of a good story, or just a way to placate the power-gamers out there. The purpose seems to contradict itself; if this was White Wolf's intention, then it would be an interesting concept similar to West End Game's *Paranoia*. Unfortunately, it seems after reading that White Wolf did not consider this a problem. However, what seems to be an odd predicament can lead to some great stories . . . with the right players.

The first 100 pages are chalk full of interesting history, traditions, and philosophy of the different types of hunters. Its interesting reading, and they do a good job of weaving Hunter into history nicely; it can get a bit dry, however. Regardless, it's good information for a storyteller looking to throw a well-developed organization into their game.

Character creation in chapter 4 is standard for Mind's Eye, with the exception of a new ability (Torture) and some new Merits and Flaws. For the most part the chapter is well-organized and easy to follow. The previous edition of *Laws of the Hunt* had an extra trait to choose: the Hunters Motivation, or why they started hunting in the first place. The removal of this is unfortunate, but fans will cope.

Chapter 5 contains the super powers you can give your mortal. If you like reading a list of powers, this chapter is for you. The remainder of the book is exactly what you would expect from a *Mind's Eye Theatre* publication: information on how challenges work, how the system works, and some story ideas.

This book has a few more quirks that make you shake your head and sigh. White Wolf seems to love their Copy and Paste. They love it so much that they included a whole section about Torture and Supernaturals twice! (Appearing once on page 32 and then again on page 272.) This duplication *could* arguably be an attempt to make sure the reader found that section, since the book lacks an index. Unfortunately, this lack of an index also makes running a game difficult when a rules question comes up (as they invariably do).

The pictures are not nearly as interesting as White Wolf's artists have produced for their tabletop games; in comparison to the other Mind's Eye Theatre books, however, they are not too bad. Two illustrations show the main characters through what appears to be a camera lens, adding to the atmosphere of the game: Be careful; you're being watched. The cover is beautiful with black and red background and silver letters. It is thicker than most storytellers are accustomed to, but that is to insure that they can always find the section on Torture when necessary! A quick look at

the cover and you would think this book is all right, but one more detail lets us enjoy one more head-shaking sigh as we see that they left out a word! Luckily, at a quick glance "Laws of Hunt" looks very similar to "Laws of the Hunt." It seems that White Wolf was in a hurry to release this book, for some reason.

Since this is the third book to cover this (or similar) material, it makes one wonder whether White Wolf is capable of getting **Hunter** right! Of course, it could be worse; after all, the tabletop source game is good, and the live action book is worthwhile. The information in this book can result in great games and fun times, easily offsetting its mistakes. The gaming community will probably simply shake their collective heads, give a quick collective laugh at White Wolf's bloopers, and forgive them for their minor mistakes. Let's just hope that White Wolf leaves **Hunter** alone for a while and stops attempting to fix it by releasing more books. **Hunter** for Live Action has become quicksand; the more White Wolf struggles to get it right, the more they sink. Stay still, leave it alone, and everything should will remain good.

--*Joshua Ramsdell*

Pyramid Review

Cube Farm

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)



Designed by James Ernest

\$4.00

James Ernest can probably take any situation and make a game out of it. Take, for example, the fact that Cheapass Games has recently moved to a larger set of offices, and you might have an explanation for *Cube Farm*. This is the fourth release from that " . . . tiny little division of Cheapass Games" known as Hip Pocket Games. Their games come packaged in ziplock bags, and -- if it can be believed -- are actually less expensive than the Cheapass range!

As well as the recent change in offices, the inspiration for *Cube Farm* is also the unexpected prosperity of an Internet start-up company and its need for more office space. Offices these days are really just open spaces with light partition walls to organize the employees/workers/serfs (depending upon your office politics and/or your position within the office hierarchy) into a little work space/station/cube shaped kingdom (ditto) of their own. Of course, there is a pecking order to everything, and in the office your status is determined by how close you are to the "good stuff."

Designed for two to five players, the objective in *Cube Farm* is to get your people as near as possible to this good stuff, such as the photocopier, coffee machine, and water cooler. Since this is a Cheapass game, some extra components are required besides the deck of roughly fifty cards already provided. Thankfully, these requirements amount to no more than a set of about ten counters -- all of a unique color -- for each player. A method of keeping score is also needed.

The two-by-three inch cards are done on a glossy white stock, each with a regular grid pattern of six light blue squares, which represents space within the office. Some of these squares are bordered in black to mark cube partition walls; other squares contain good stuff (marked in gray with a positive number along with its name) and other squares contain personnel, such as a vice president or receptionist (marked in black with a negative number). Three cards are marked with an elevator bank that dominates the card space.

At the game's start, one of these elevator cards is placed down in the center of the table. Players receive five cards, or six if it is only a two-handed game. A complete game of *Cube Farm* ends when a single hand has been played per player, or a total of four hands if a two-player game. In a hand, players take turns to put down cards and build the office space, with the squares on the new card needing to connect with those on the office plan. As each card goes down, an employee can be played on to it, preferably as close to any good stuff as possible and as far away from any personnel as is possible. A whole cubicle can run over in another card, and although more than one employee is legally allowed within a cubicle, they cannot belong to multiple players. Employees must also be able to trace a direct line, unblocked by cube walls, to an elevator.

Once everyone has played all of their cards, the hand is over and can be scored; this is a relatively simple process. Besides a base score equal to the number of workers it contains, a cube scores a bonus for any good stuff within walking distance of the cube. This is determined by the value of the good stuff: two points for the coffee machine, three for the paper shredder, and four for the supply cabinet. The route does not have to be a straight line, but only a number of squares also equal to the value. Personnel squares work in the same manner, but their negative value is deducted from the cube's score. Through clever play of both cards and counters, it is possible for an employee to be within walking distance of more than one item of good stuff, as well as personnel. Once one hand is scored, another is played, and so on, until the end of the game when the highest score determines the winner.

Cube Farm does have the feel and playing style of the German board game *Carcassonne*. This is not really surprising, as both are tile-laying, point-scoring games; the comparison is not to the detriment of *Cube Farm*. Of course, this does not have the high quality components, but that is the point of a Cheapass Game, and the themes of either could not be more diverse. *Cube Farm* is for anyone who has had to experience office life and its politics, and who wants to get some pleasure out of it for a change! Once again, this is another pleasing design from James Ernest, that gives both value for money and enjoyment in equal measure. It is also good to see a game designed with two players as the minimum as opposed to the more usual three.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Tempest Feud (for the Star Wars Roleplaying Game)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)



Written By Jeff Grubb and Owen K.C. Stephens

128 pages; \$24.95

Tempest Feud is the first published adventure for the Wizards of the Coast *Star Wars d20* system. Because this is the first adventure, one would assume that there is a great deal riding on its quality, and that WOC would go out of its way to ensure its success. A friend of mine says that if they put "Star Wars" on the side of a bottle of rat poison, he would probably drink it. Well, *Tempest Feud* is by no means rat poison, but it is far from the best work to ever come out of Renton, Washington. So far the quality of supplements for the *Star Wars RPG* has been extremely high. Wizards of the Coast has hired great writers and some well-known comic book artists to make its books worth the \$25-\$40 the books and supplements cost. Because of this legacy of quality, *Tempest Feud* has a lot to live up to; unfortunately, it does not quite make it.

Tempest Feud is a 128-page adventure arranged like a script in three acts with two intermissions; it's unclear why Grubb and Stephens did it this way, and I hope this is not a template for the future. The acts are broken up into one act of twelve scenes and two acts of ten scenes apiece. Although the book speaks of this being "A sweeping adventure," *Tempest Feud* is more of a book of three short adventures. The two intermissions give stopping points for storylines. The authors suggest that players take a break from *Tempest Feud* to get some side action and some additional experience before moving on to the next act. The last 22 pages consist of six appendices. Oddly enough, these pages contain the most enjoyable reading and the best information.

[BEGIN SPOILER ALERT]

Tempest Feud concerns itself with the Hutts and their empire. This is the information that will be of interest to casual readers and non-*Star Wars* gamers. The introduction is loaded with great information on the Hutt culture; for instance, how much different would *Return of the Jedi* have seemed if we had known that Hutts are endowed with male and female reproductive organs? The information contained in the introduction and appendices goes a long way in clearing up questions about the Hutts. In discussing the history and organization behind the Hutts and their criminal empire, you begin to get an idea of why they wield so much power. As villains the Hutts have lacked some development and credibility. In general, they suffer from the same fundamental drawbacks as Daleks: a good head start and a flight of stairs and neither can give chase. It's hard to imagine an angry Hutt waiting for you in an alley with a sock full of pennies.

Without giving away too much of the plot, characters are directed to interact and deal with a powerful Hutt family on Nar Shaddaa. Although the opening plot has the characters making a simple deal with the head of the Hutt family, they are slowly drawn into a larger adventure (the scenario surrounding the players' introduction depends on which time period you are playing in . . . more on that in a minute). In order to secure the information for which the players have come, they must in turn perform a task for the Hutt; this is a pretty standard plot device, but it helps to move the players along. Players will interact with a variety of Hutts, with government officials, and a few drunken Wookies. Along the way there will be some diplomacy, negotiations, an intergalactic plague, space combat, and more drunken Wookies. Although the characters will travel from planet to planet and situation to situation, the driving force behind this adventure is the wily interfamily machinations of the Hutt family.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Allowances are made for GMs to run the game in any of the three gameable time periods (Republic days, Rebellion, and New Republic) and to adapt the adventure to their particular group (allowing for aligned or unaligned players). All of this flexibility is great, but it helps to create some of the adventure's larger problems. The authors offer several scenarios depending on the actions of the party; in theory this would be a good thing, and it would be if it were done with some finesse. Most of the text is extremely dry, and it becomes confusing and leads to *Tempest Feud*'s other main drawback. Constrained by the need to keep all options open, the authors were forced to make allowances for gameability; as a result, the text is often awkward and clunky.

Like most supplements for the *Star Wars* system, *Tempest Feud* is loaded with in-depth information about all aspects of *Star Wars* (in this case, about the Hutts and their culture). Unlike most of the *Star Wars* supplements, *Tempest Feud* is not much fun to read. Books like *The Dark Side Sourcebook* and *Alien Anthology* are entertaining to read even for nonplayers. Since most game designers are adept at getting information across to players quickly and clearly (while still being entertaining), Wizards of the Coast's *Star Wars* books read like good reference books for anyone interested in *Star Wars*. As mentioned above, the writing in this book is below the standard set by other writers of the *Star Wars* game.

With all of the problems that *Tempest Feud* has, it is not without its merits or uses. Aspects of the plot and at least a few of the NPCs are really worth taking the time to look at. The few Hutts that are described in some detail and the CSA officers are nicely fleshed out. Additionally, the adventure gives nice descriptions of several different worlds and a couple of good ships. In the fine tradition of gaming, this adventure is ripe for the picking. Many of the better aspects of the adventure (and much of the plot) could easily be adapted to a group's ongoing campaign or used as side adventures for any adventure they may be running. As far as salvaging parts of this adventure to use in other adventures, the same pieces could be used to fill in holes in any space-based RPG. Pieces of this could easily be wedged into the *Traveller d20* system or any of the space-based *GURPS* systems.

This game's general drawback is the same as any system based on such an obsessed-over and debated topic as *Star Wars*. The danger for overly picayune arguments to erupt during game play is always present. Anyone alive when the movie was released in 1977 is bound to believe that they possess the definitive knowledge of the *Star Wars* universe; this is the case with many games based on literary or movie sources. Where Wizards of the Coast has really excelled in this book (and in others in the *Star Wars d20* series) is the amount of remarkable research that goes into the contents.

Wizards has also gone out of its way to make the artwork in previous supplements to the *SWRPG* some of the best in the industry. Dan Brereton (Nocturnals) and Ashley Wood (Spawn, Sam and Twitch) decorated the interior of the *Dark Side Sourcebook* and truly elevated the standard for interior art. The artists that worked on *Tempest Feud*, while obviously good artists, break no new ground with their interior work.

In the interest of full disclosure, I should state that I do not play the *Star Wars RPG*. As a game it has not interested me enough to seek out other players and set up a campaign. That being said, I have read the majority of supplements that have been released in the last year, and I have liked all of them. They are, for the most part, some of the more enjoyable, well-researched, and reader- friendly books that I have seen in the two decades that I have been role-playing. It is just too bad that *Tempest Feud* fails to rise to the exacting standards set by its predecessors.

--Greg Kessler

Four Lords of Mars

"Why, every school boy on Barsoom knows the geography, and much concerning the fauna and flora, as well as the history of your planet fully as well as of his own. Can we not see everything which takes place upon Earth, as you call it; is it not hanging there in the heavens in plain sight?"

-- Dejah Thoris, in *A Princess of Mars* by Edgar Rice Burroughs

In honor of Jim Cambias' sublime *GURPS Mars*, we return to the topic of alternate Martian invasions. But rather than [Wellsian conquerors](#) from Outside, this time, let's look at Burroughsian invaders from Earth. (For purposes of *GURPS Mars* adaptation, assume that our four explorers all begin in the Marineris city-states on Dying Mars.) Without further ado, then, thrill if you will to the alternate adventures of alternate warlords on the next Barsoom over.

"All this however was described with exaggeration to the Senate, in the speeches of those members who proposed a public thanksgiving, and that on the days of the thanksgiving the prince should wear the triumphal robe and enter Rome in ovation, lastly, that he should have statues on the same scale as those of Mars."

-- Tacitus, *The Annals*, XIII

By 61 A.D., Sextus Afranius Burrus, the Praetorian Prefect of Rome, knew that Nero was as mad as Caligula had been. Nero had long been troubled by strange dreams; now, he insisted, the god Mars was plotting against him and needed to be taught a lesson. Nero's maniacal searches uncovered a ritual in the hidden books of the Sibyls, deciphered by the poet Seneca (Nero's other main adviser besides Burrus). Seneca ground the carefully selected iron stones from heaven in the pattern laid out below the Pyramids of Egypt, as the Tenth and Fifth Legions stood uncomprehendingly by. Nobody was more surprised than Seneca and Burrus when the ritual actually worked, sending them both, and the two legions, beyond the crystal spheres to the planet Mars to make war on the God of War.

They never found him, but subduing the hornet's nest of city-states they did encounter took three years. The Martians barely understood the technologies they used against Burrus' legions, while the Romans understood war better than any people on two planets. By the time Nero died, the legions included more Martians than Romans, and had moved on to conquer the other rich canal-bottom states. Burrus himself died in 70 A.D., and was succeeded by Marcus Ulpius, commander of the Tenth, and he in his turn by his son Trajan -- who brilliantly completed the conquest of Mars for a Rome few men on the planet could even recall. The final fall of the Hellenic Empire did, however, put Trajan in command of devices by which he could communicate with Roman soothsayers. They revealed that Rome had collapsed into civil war, tyranny, and anarchy following a successful Judaeian revolt five years after the Martian invasion had departed. PCs in this *GURPS Imperial Rome-Mars* crossover setting can play Roman officers during the campaigns of Burrus, colonial legates watching for revolt in the canal cities, or brave Martian legionaries willing to recross the crystal barrier, rescue Rome, and fulfill the dreams of Sextus Afranius Burrus, Dominus Bellorum Martis.

"This 9th May Mr Burroughs carried me up to an exceeding high mountain and shewed me all the kingdoms of the earth and tould me that he would give them all to me if I would writ in his book and if I would not he would thro me down and brake my neck."

-- Testimony of Mercy Lewis, before the judges at Salem, 1692

In early May, 1692, agents of the court in Salem, Massachusetts, nervously rode north to Wells, Maine, to arrest the man their informants named as "the king of the Witches" and "Confederate of the Devil," the controversial preacher George Burroughs. Although short of stature, Burroughs had often displayed feats of inhuman strength, and was known to consort with Indians and other dangerous elements. Surprising Burroughs at dinner, the deputies bundled him onto a horse for a ride to Salem and justice. However, during the night, a great storm arose; the deputies later reported the devil seized their horses and carried them up into the air as lightning played around Burroughs' form. When they returned to the ground, Burroughs was gone -- his infernal master had rescued him.

Burroughs had, as it happens, tried a very powerful incantation that night, learned in long study in his books. Rather than return him to safety in Maine, however, it transported him across the gulfs of space and to the planet Mars, populated by [fallen angels](#) and base calibans. Burroughs' magical powers, and his prodigious strength magnified to

immense proportions by the weaker Martian gravity, soon made him master of their world. His agents, both spectral and material, began to make trips from Mars to Earth, scouting the colonies and contacting subversive witch-cults to prepare for the coming invasion. Cotton Mather remained alert to the clear and present danger -- he and a small group of assistants work feverishly to prevent diabolic influences and Martian power from harming God's country. PCs in this *Atomick Horror* game might be black-clad agents of Mather's "Majestick Twelve Disciples", philosophical apprentices working with the young genius Ben Franklin to uncover the mysteries of the angelic craft that crash-landed near Dunwich, or even wizards and heathens in secret league with George Burroughs, Witch-Lord of Mars!

"It was a thrilling moment for an excavator. Alone, save for my native workmen, I found myself, after years of comparatively unproductive labour, on the threshold of what might prove to be a magnificent discovery. Anything, literally anything, might be beyond that passage, and it needed all my self-control to keep from breaking down the doorway, and investigating there and then."

-- Howard Carter, *The Tomb of Tut.Ankh.Amen*

Ronald Montagu Burrows had a similar moment in 1896 when he came upon the carved gateway buried deep in a cave on the island of Sphacteria. Its designs somehow combined Mycenaean motifs with even older glyphs, totally strange even to the brilliant archaeologist. When he finally opened the door, he discovered not some unknown tomb or buried treasure trove but something even more wonderful -- a doorway cut through the fabric of space itself, emerging in the hills above a city-state on canal-bedecked Mars. Burrows' philhellenism was both heartfelt and obsessive; one look at the fluted columns, orderly canals, and noble statuary of the Martian cities convinced him -- the Martians were descended from the mighty heroes of ancient Greece! Or vice versa, but the point was -- Mars was Greek!

Burrows and his message of Mars' ancient heritage of democracy and learning arrived at precisely the right -- or the wrong -- time for the wrangling cities of the Marineris canal system. Reformers, rabble-rousers, and novelty-seekers from all across Mars flocked to Burrows' lectures; by 1900, he (and, somewhat less willingly, the British naval advisors on the site) had overseen an explosion of democratic rebellions and coups all across the region. The Martian League of Cities eagerly joined Greece in declaring war on the Central Powers in 1914, many Martian volunteers having already served with Greek forces during the Balkan Wars. However, the thousands of Martian dogfeet killed at Gallipoli, and the bitter disappointments of the disastrous 1920-1922 war against Turkey, soured the League on involvement in further adventures. The dislocations of interplanetary trade also caused further turmoil, even as the more distant Martian empires felt their own democratic Burrowsite revolutions. For two decades, only a few adventurers, merchants, and scholars passed through the gates at Sphacteria; Burrows retreated with his peerage into honored obscurity at King's College. But by 1941, rumors fly that Nazi panzers are about to smash into Greece -- can a few brave PCs get to Sphacteria ahead of the Luftwaffe and save the Red Planet for the democratic legacy of Ronald Montagu Burrows, Lord Mars?

"We are setting out to create new worlds, new beings, new modes of consciousness."

-- William S. Burroughs, *The Adding Machine*

In a squalid marketplace in Tangier, unknown writer William S. Burroughs celebrated his fortieth birthday by purchasing an extremely peculiar brick of hashish, reportedly grown on the graves of Sufi masters themselves descended from the True Lineage of the Sky Princes. He consumed it with a kind of languid fervor, and with a lot of other stuff that littered the bed table, and passed out. It says much for Burroughs' presence of mind, and for the quality of the hash, that for several hours after he awoke, he still thought himself in Tangier, only the twin moons in the sky and the six fingers of passersby giving him momentary pause. The liquors and opiates of the marketplace became curiously unfamiliar as his amiable high dissipated, and the curious reluctance of the shining-eyed hawkers to accept American greenbacks finally brought home to him that he had somehow translated himself off the Planet Earth, where the dollar was king.

Here, Burroughs was king, although it took him several more hallucinatory encounters with an increasingly unsettled Martian watch force to realize it; his own telepathic powers and artistic alchemy (and perhaps the Nephilitic drug cocktail flushing his body of the control viruses implanted by the crustaceans) somehow allowed him to alter Mars into the state his mind thought most truthful. Between his own pulp sci-fi dreams, Martian technologies, and the ancestral RNA of his grandfather (who invented a mechanical computer), he summoned amplifiers that broadcast his message to

Earth: all the beats, freaks, lonely, lost, victims and confidence men were welcome immigrants to the Interzone on the fourth planet. This setting presents a kind of *Atomic Horror-Over the Edge* campaign; the PCs can experience all manner of surrealistic scams and mauve swordfights as they adjust to life in Upper Interzone, or they can try to investigate the conspiracies, villains, and techno-magics spawned from Burroughs' nightmares and viral discards. (They can even be Martians struggling to hold back the madness fueled by the Invaders From Earth.) Meanwhile, the forces of conformity from McCarthy to Malenkov stare helplessly up, unable to prevent their own people from flocking to the standard of William S. Burroughs, Drug-Lord of Mars.

I Think Icon, I Think Icon

It's part IV! Does that mean it's time to travel back to the 1980s and rescue whales? No! It means we're in Part IV of our discussion of various character power levels. This week we're discussing the highly competent, remarkably skilled, but still iconic characters.

Captain Kirk. James Bond. Batman. MacGyver. Doc Savage. Sherlock Holmes.

To quote the cliché, you're the best there is at what you do.

Sure, there's a heck of a lot of fun to be had in playing someone with down-to-earth abilities, motivations, and limitations. But there's also something to be said about playing an icon. The pinnacle of achievement or ability. The one that makes folks say, "The world is in danger! The only one who can save us is [YOUR CHARACTER'S NAME]!"

These characters are human, in that they don't possess any abilities that couldn't (theoretically) be explained as feasible for one skilled -- or lucky -- enough. But they're also far removed from humanity, in that they are often unrealistically skilled, trained, equipped, or -- again -- lucky. If anyone *could* achieve the level of human-limit perfection required by those stories, they would almost certainly not have the type -- or at least the quantity -- of tales that the iconic fictional heroes have. It's a fine line to straddle, but these characters represent people that *could* happen, but never do.

So how do you use these heroes?

To reiterate, you're probably the best there is at what you do . . . or at least one of the best. That statement is pretty straightforward, but look at it sideways. First, you need to decide what your character does. Make it big, sweeping, and focused, but open-ended. You are the best:

- Detective.
- Scientist.
- Street fighter.
- Cat burglar.
- Spy.
- Acrobat.
- Forensics specialist.
- Escape artist.
- Pilot.

Of course, depending on the game you may well be more than one of these things; Batman is an incredible detective *and* martial artist, for example.

Now, presuming that you're the best [WHATEVER], look at the rest of the statement: no guarantees. You may be the best cat burglar in the world, but that doesn't mean you have any skills or abilities *beyond* that; when you break into the "impenetrable" government stronghold, that doesn't mean you'll necessarily have the computer skills to hack the bad guys' computers.

This fact makes the iconic human power level *very* well-suited to roleplaying. Gather your consummate scientist, world-renowned diplomat, master tactician, and unparalleled assassin, and you've got yourself something that

How powerful do you like your characters to be in RPGs you play in, compared to the rest of the populace?

Gods among men! I like really powerful characters. (Four-Colored Supers, High Magic, *In Nomine*) 2%

Powerful! I like characters with abilities far different from normal people. (*Vampire*, *Mage*, Jedi) 8%

Highly competent! I like characters that are still human, but incredibly skilled. (Batman, James Bond, *Black Ops*) 13%

Competent! I like characters that are human, but still more skilled than normal folks. (*X-Files*, *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Call of Cthulhu*) 33%

Normal! I like my characters human. (some *Traveller* games) 4%

Men among gods! I like playing weak characters among very strong forces. (*Bunnies & Burrows*) 0%

It depends. I like playing lots of different power levels. 36%

Dude! I don't roleplay! 0%

suspiciously resembles a typical gaming party.

Some games (and genres) emphasize this more than others. Most stereotypical cinematic special ops movies have their heroes as *very* specialized, almost entirely useless outside of their field of expertise (except the square-jawed hombra in the center foreground of the poster, of course). The standard **Black Ops** game, on the other hand, tends to provide heroes with a wide range of useful abilities outside of their specializations. The level of ancillary abilities will greatly affect the flavor of the game. If everyone has adequate computer skills, for example, than the old-school hacking guru on the team will be tapped much less; if he's unavailable, the rest of the party can try their luck first. On the other hand, if no one has combat skills except for Kass Ick the martial artist, then the rest of the players may be bored in any combat situations.

At this point it should be mentioned that (at least in my experience) this specialization is probably a *good* thing; especially in point-based games there can be a temptation to spread an obscene number of points thin, being somewhat skilled in everything. Unfortunately, such characters are almost always overshadowed by other heroes that *have* used their points to specialize more. If *everyone* spreads their points impossibly thin, then there's the danger of all the heroes resembling each other, plus many of the appeals of the ultra-skilled human game are mitigated. The kind of challenges iconic humans face generally make it an advantage to be specialized. (I'm sure it's possible to make a game work where everyone has scads of roughly equal moderately powerful skills in lieu of ultra-specialization, but I've never encountered one.)

How did you get your abilities? Who cares? Unlike the moderately skilled human (discussed last week), the origins of the iconic human's abilities are generally glossed over. In fact, at this level, practically any explanation will prove inadequate. Lots of would-be scientists go to MIT and work on top-secret projects; that doesn't mean they all turn into the super-geniuses that investigate lost civilizations. The standard origins of most of these characters are usually the same: Natural skill and ability, coupled with hard work and determination, plus a big bowl of Wheaties every day.

On the other hand, motivation is perhaps even *more* important. If you are the greatest criminal psychologist in the world, why do you get out of bed in the morning? Sherlock Holmes and the Batman have many similarities in their abilities, but what really differentiates them is their motivations (and whether the undergarments go on the inside or out). Holmes is ultimately bored, and approaches investigations and crimes as a way of staving off his ennui. Batman is driven by a desire for vengeance, and uses his abilities to make sure the guilty are punished.

The hero has these remarkable abilities; why does he use them? Guilt? Sense of responsibility? Because they seek thrills and adventures? Because they're obligated to by some agency or higher power? Answering this question solidly will result in a more believable and interesting iconic character, and should help prevent him from resembling the generic all-skilled cipher that populates most summer action films.

Know your limitations; perhaps more importantly, make sure the GM knows your limitations. This is related to the skill-set idea above; knowing the boundaries of your character's abilities will enable the GM to create challenging adventures, and present possibilities that allow the hero an opportunity to evolve and grow (which can be difficult because they *are* iconic). If your character spends all his time in the Vengeance Cave investigating crime and the underworld, then he probably won't know anything about entertainment or popular figures. Perhaps the martial artist has a moral (or psychological) limitation preventing him from hitting a woman. In this case "limitations" can either mean actual in-game disadvantages (which are often limited in iconic characters), or merely a lack of ability. The superspy may not have any piloting skill, for example; what does he do when the pilot of the jumbo jet has been accidentally shot by the evil mastermind?

Get a hobby. Iconic heroes are often enhanced by their extracurricular activities; since they usually don't have human-level disadvantages, these aspects of the mundane often serve to tie the heroes to humanity. You may not have the mind of Sherlock Holmes, but you have a reasonable chance of playing the violin better than him. Gil Grisham from the TV show *CSI* has an interest in entomology. James Bond enjoys spending quality time with the opposite sex. Captain Picard has an affinity for archeology, pulp detective works, and playing the flute. (Actually, Picard has more hobbies than *I* do, come to think of it . . . clearly I need to become a starship captain to get some free time.)

It's not crucial that an iconic hero has these outside interests, but it can add a fair bit to the character. Another option,

of course, is that the hero *has* no other interests; this increases the inhumanity of the character but also explains why he is so skilled. If he defines his life solely by exploring the scientific universe, then the rest of the world should well elude him (or at least hold no interest). This avoidance of anything outside of the specialization, of course, leads directly to the "know your limitations" point, above.

We've all had dreams of being the best; the iconic -- but human -- hero provides an opportunity to live that dream. It's often fairly easy to play these characters since they are still human, plus the fears and unknowns of character limitations aren't as prevalent; if you have a Diplomacy skill of eight jillion, you can be reasonably assured of making your Diplomacy skill rolls. Provided you remember both aspects of the ultra-skilled human -- reveling in the phenomenal skills while remembering the humanity -- everyone involved should have a great time.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **GURPS Aliens**, p. 122.*

*(Two stars) "**Play only when there is an Evidence meld for Druitt in play.** Over the years this barrister and cricket player has been a popular choice for the Ripper."*

Dork Tower #19 went to press this week, and John has provided us with a sample page:

Dork Tower!



Watch for *Dork Tower #19*, coming soon!

DT #19



Dork Tower!



Election Day

Electoral Ideas for Fictional Democracies

by Michele Armellini

Peaceful times are *boring*. Adventurers need restless turmoil! Why not exploit a suitably volatile ruling system for providing that? A Fantasy or a Space campaign could support democracies. In a Fantasy setting, cities might develop a degree of self-rule in the way of Italian medieval communes. In Space, any planet may have a democratic system. While the standard ruling system in Fantasy campaigns is feudal, local government can be democratic, up to a point (see pp. F16, TR6). Several government forms are listed on p. CII185; many of them may feature voting as a major part of the mechanism.

But how does the system actually work? How can it become interesting for adventurers? Here are a few ideas plus adventure seeds.

Voters

Who can vote? The answer to this question might well change the definition of the ruling system. If only Status 3+ men vote, this isn't exactly a democracy; it's an oligarchy. Historically, suffrage has seldom been universal. Here are some limitations.

- **Sex.** Women were one of the last groups to obtain suffrage on Earth. A realistic democratic Fantasy setting will be recognizably familiar if women can't vote. OTOH, no sex discrimination would make for an unusual Fantasy system, while it's probably the norm on Sci-Fi planets . . . and a matriarchy is always interesting!

Adventure Seed: if Aristophanes could (mockingly) conceive a bid for power by women, why not the GM? Bring in a suffragette movement!

- **Status and Wealth.** These are common hurdles. *GURPS* has these as built-in game mechanics; the GM could simply rule that in order to vote, one must be Status 0 or better. Historically, Wealth has often been used as an objective measure of Status; in *GURPS*, failure to comply with the table on p. B191 brings "appropriate penalties"; for example, loss of voting rights (assessing whether a Senatorial family was rich enough was a key task for the Roman *censor*). However, birth may be important: British lords have their own voting assembly just because of the family they were born in.

Adventure Seed: Cheat the censor! Or buy, threaten, blackmail, or . . . kill him! Anything, but don't let the family suffer the infamy of being declassified.

- **Citizenship.** This seems obvious and straightforward; it comes either with the blood (you were born by citizens) or the land (you were born here). However, depending on how a citizen is defined, it can be used as a catch-all system to disqualify people. Citizenship might require a Vow, Literacy, a Duty (again, the *GURPS* advantage-disadvantage system comes in handy - what about a system where only Magery grants citizenship?). Perhaps to be a citizen you have to be a taxpayer, a member of a certain church, or, going with Heinlein, a former serviceman/woman. Foreigners and offworlders are usually out. But, for how long do they remain foreigners?

Adventure Seed: a far-away constitutional court has ruled that the right of the blood is to be replaced by the right of the land. All those second-generation offworlders will vote next time, since they were born here!

- **Second-Class Citizens.** Not being able to vote may well define a group as having a Social Stigma (probably at the -10 level), regardless of the reason disqualifying them. Note that customs might be different -- and stronger -

- than written law -- as it happened often for African-Americans after the Civil War.

Adventure Seed: "Have you heard that Goblins will be allowed their own representative in the City Council? I hope the Duke does something about it -- and if he doesn't, the boys of the Thieves' Guild will".

Voting Rules

The devil is in the details. Even without outright frauds, the mechanics of the election are the ideal way to rig it.

- **Public vote.** This is the rule as long as Literacy is uncommon. It means voters can be intimidated by their employee or by anybody's goons.

Adventure Seed: The adventurers are hired "to keep the peace" at the ballots. Yet it seems voters are afraid of them! After all, everybody knows the fearsome Lord Dunstan hired them. Then the Watch shows up . . .

- **Secret vote.** If the candidates are assigned a number or symbol, and/or pottery scraps or colored balls can be used as ballots, a secret vote can be held even with illiterate voters. This prevents intimidation but makes frauds easier. Who'll count the ballots? Will it be done in public? A high-tech variant is of course the electronic vote (p. CY100). Hackers, anyone?

Adventure Seed: The ballots for a vital election have to be taken to a central location for counting. The PCs will escort them. Enough said.

- **Constituency tricks.** When votes are cast within local constituencies, the party in power can do some gerrymandering (after Massachusetts Governor Gerry). For instance, they can create artificial constituencies in such a way that areas held by the opposition are cut into small bits and put together with areas where supporters are more numerous. Or, if the population in a constituency is decreasing, never acknowledge that, and keep giving that "rotten borough" the same power as a much more populous one . . . if they are strong in the former and weak in the latter.

Adventure Seed: Why should each of 31 under-populated country boroughs wield the same power as one of the 4 populous city boroughs overflowing with plebeians? Why, because rich landowners hold sway over those country areas. A populist leader suggested to reform the borough system. The idea is, literally, revolutionary . . . and the patricians want to stop him at all costs. Yes, this is republican Rome and that's exactly how the *comitia tributa* worked.

- **Calendar tricks.** It may be of great help to have a say on when the election will be held. Are the farmers a problem? The ideal election day will be at harvest time.

Adventure Seed: The General Assembly will have only a day to deliberate, because after that the Holy Days will begin, and voting would be a violation. We can't keep the Assembly convened for a week . . . but don't worry, the Executive Committee will take care of all outstanding matters.

- **Other tricks.** Politicians have devised many other ways to exploit a specific system's weaknesses. Often, the more complicated the system, the more mind-boggling the trick. Among others, there are ways to exploit the math behind proportional or majority representation, decoy parties (having a symbol closely resembling the opponents'), hatchet candidates.

Adventure Seed: The Merchants' Guild normally wins some four City Council seats. This year the Guild nominated five candidates as usual, but three other Master Merchants are running, too! Are they actually decoy candidates, betraying their Guild and working for the Craftsmen's Guilds? If so, why? If the merchants split their votes, they may well win just one or two seats.

Organizing Consensus

It is difficult for candidates to go begging individual voters for their vote (even though this can be done, too; see below). So consensus normally flows through some form of organization.

- **Political parties.** As we know them, they are suitable for a Space campaign but probably not for a Fantasy one. Parties may serve as well-oiled machines exchanging votes for favors, reminding the ways of 19th century Tammany Hall. Parties are interesting in that, for a candidate, the confrontation with the opposing party only comes after he won the nomination -- so this becomes a political marathon with internecine struggles, conventions, backroom deals, and non-stop campaigning.

Adventure Seed: One of the PCs has decided to run as a third-party candidate, maybe just to prove a point. He stands no chance . . . until the favorite is shattered by a scandal. Suddenly the PC candidate receives under-the-counter, alluring proposals. Will he be willing to sell his soul?

- **Interest groups.** These may be a less organized form of parties, but also lobbies, Guilds (see p. F17-19), churches, associations, or fund-raising systems. Today they go hand in hand with parties, and their interactions may give a GM interesting ideas, but in a fictional setting they may replace parties.

Adventure Seed: The adventurers are policemen, reporters, or members of a party. They receive anonymous tips that a candidate (maybe their own party's candidate!) is on the payroll of someone powerful. But who? And why?

- **Patronage.** This is a pyramid system creating a web of mutual allegiances, clearly described on p. IR9-10. Often it survives within parties and groups, too. When it comes to politics it may have interesting effects, because the local magistrate may well be the patron of many influential voters; they vote for him, he does them favors. But who is *his* patron in turn?

Adventure Seed: the adventurers have a powerful Patron. He tells them they have to endorse, support, and vote candidate X . . . who stands for everything they loathe.

- **Clans.** These are interesting because they have features of both the interest groups and the patronage system, but they are stronger because of the family ties. In Fantasy settings they can be the remnants of an archaic ruling system, which still wield some power as consensus builders.

Adventure Seed: Candidates need the endorsement of as many clans as possible, and clan leaders are elders. One is doddering and deaf, another is eccentric and stubborn, a third is just for sale, a fourth has his own agenda . . . Candidates will need to use promises, flattery, fine speeches, bribery, and intimidation.

- **Bread and games.** We don't need to organize voters; just give them what they want! The most lavish candidate will be at a distinct advantage. He can be subtle (offering entertainment or fringe benefits) or less so (offering cash or jobs). The question is, where is all this money coming from?

Adventure Seed: On this sparsely-populated, backward frontier planet, a candidate has established his own TV station . . . at the same time TV sets are being sold at bargain prices. The programs are entertaining, the ads abound, and the candidate is popular. But the adventurers know he's corrupt. And he must have a secret agenda.

- **Customized advertising.** At higher TLs, and by spending lots of money, candidates can court each voter, one by one. The key to customized mailing is to know each voter's leaning, preferences, and sensitive issues, so they can be told what they exactly want to hear. Knowledge is power.

Adventure Seed: Obviously this customized planetary campaign is tapping from huge databases that should remain shrouded in privacy. They must be using hackers!

Frauds

Every step in the process is susceptible of crude or cunning frauds. Widespread frauds are dangerous if there is an authority who can cancel the elections, and/or if local public opinion or international condemnation have relevance. Frauds are more often used as a limited backup effort, only within critical contested constituencies.

- **Voter eligibility.** A classic trick is to get votes from those who shouldn't or cannot vote -- absentees, emigrants, and even dead men! Control over the electoral roll helps. A rougher variation is to bar from voting those who *are* entitled to . . . if they are likely to vote against you.

Adventure Seed: In a Horror variation of the "dead men voting" trick -- what if they do indeed show up at the poll station?!

- **Ballot counting.** Scrutineers can be bought; machines and software can be tampered with.

Adventure Seed: The PCs are just ordinary people, but they have all been randomly appointed as scrutineers. Their poll station is in a critical district. During the week before the elections, they all receive offers . . . of the kind they can't refuse.

- **Other frauds.** Voted ballot-papers can be added to the boxes. Friends can register and vote more than once in several city districts. The ballot-papers can be deliberately confusing. The would riggers need control over the overseeing authorities, and/or the electoral rolls, or (again) the help of some scrutineers. These frauds are interesting both in themselves, and in their aftermath.

Adventure Seed: After this colony planet's first general election, there are no clear-cut results; the electoral system is absurdly complex and the ballot-papers misleading. Rumors and allegations of widespread frauds abound. The PCs are Federal monitors; will they discover *everyone* cheated? What will they do?

Offices

In order to shape a democracy, the GM needs to know how the government is run, how the branches interact through checks and balances, and where the real power is. He will want to assign specific offices for the legislative, executive and judicial powers; additionally, there may be a powerful bureaucracy.

- **No division of powers.** This is uncommon for real-life democracies, because it's typical of autocratic rule. A ruler, or small group, will have every power. The *Adventure Seed* here is obvious: Why should they accept to step down, ever? As the election day approaches, and polls show the incumbent rulers are going to be defeated, accidents/riots/foreign hostilities erupt. Elections are postponed.
- **Checks and balances.** The branches of power are separate and independent, everyone does their jobs and keeps in check the others. This is easier said than done. Sometimes the legislators are a rubber-stamping body, or the top executive officer is just a figurehead; or maybe everyone wields real power, but by reciprocal vetoes the government becomes unable to do anything.

Adventure Seed: The King isn't elected, but the Assembly is, and since the King is spurning them, they refuse to pass laws to finance his beloved war project. Will the King budge, or will he dare suppress the Assembly?

- **Judges and politics.** These can mix with explosive effects, especially when judges are elected, and also when politicians are corrupt. The Italian "Clean Hands" prosecutors destroyed powerful ruling parties.

Adventure Seed: The new Planetary Attorney is taking the laws dealing with campaign funding seriously; he's already impeached officials and ruined careers! Elections are due in four months, but if a party follows the rules, it stands no chance of winning; if it doesn't . . . Is the Attorney out for all politicians? Or only some of them? The PCs can be prosecutors, policemen, or straight politicians and campaign managers. Or not-so-straight ones.

- **Bureaucrats rule.** An interesting (and maybe infuriating) turn-around for a PC who won the election is to discover that the bureaucrats stonewall him and they are actually running the show. This of course calls for

radical reforms!

Adventure Seed: On this planet, democracy recently supplanted a totalitarian government, but the bureaucratic machine keeps working in the good old bad ways. Their bane is, of course, the outspoken, hard-nosed media news team.

A *GURPS* Politician

But what does a PC or NPC politician look like in *GURPS*?

He has high IQ and reasonable HT (as a basis for important HT-based skills, Carousing and Sex-Appeal).

He has several key advantages, mainly those that will help him in dealing with people, the stuff politics is made of. Appearance, Charisma, Fashion Sense, Sanctity, Status, Voice (very cost-effective for politicians) and above all Reputation (a cherished politician's advantage) serve to improve other people's reactions. Some of the same advantages, plus Empathy or Sensitive, also help in manipulating others. A politician lives off a web of relationships that can be portrayed by Ally, Ally Group, Claim to Hospitality, Contact, Favor, and Patron. Wealth, and/or various forms of authority (Administrative or other Rank, Clerical Investment, Heir, Immunities, Legal Enforcement Powers, Security Clearance, Status again) help the politician to jump-start his career and make him independent from others. Intuition, Literacy, Single-Minded, Strong Will are also handy and common.

As to disadvantages, they can be used to represent the politician's motivations. He might just be extremely ambitious (Glory Hound, Megalomania, Obsession), driven by an ideal (Fanaticism, Vow -- and even Delusions), or by good old-fashioned Greed. He might be a nice guy (Code of Honor, Honesty, Selfless, Sense of Duty) or the classic crooked politician (Callous, Bad Temper and/or Bully, Intolerance, Secret [corrupt or worse], Self-centered or Selfish). It seems many of them indulge in the usual vices (Alcoholism, Laziness, Lecherousness), while others may have even too much of a social life (Chummy, Compulsive Carousing). Typical flaws may include Curious, Edgy, Overconfidence, Overweight, or Workaholic. If in office, a politician has a non-dangerous Duty; most of them have Enemies.

Social skills in general are a must for politicians; they of course need high levels in Politics, Bard, and Diplomacy (in that order), but they'll also make use of skills that influence people: Carousing, Fast-Talk, Savoir-Faire, Sex-Appeal, and maybe Intimidation. Area Knowledge is needed at high levels, because that makes you a two-legged "Who's Who" inventory.

Many politicians also have Detect Lies, Leadership, and Performance; if they are good at their job, they'll have Administration. Less important capabilities include: Acting, Body Language, Law, and Merchant (for haggling). Background skills may include Economics, Gesture, Languages, Psychology, and Writing. And any skills representing the politicians' ideas are useful, like Conspiracy Theory, Philosophy, or Theology.

Unforgettable sample *GURPS* politicians are in several books:

- *GURPS Fantasy*, pp. 91-96 (sidebars);
- *GURPS Tredroy*, p. 49-50;
- *GURPS I.S.T.*, pp. 9-13 (sidebars);
- *GURPS Villains*, pp. 8, 50, 125 (sidebar);
- and have a look at the Fixer in *GURPS Rogues*.

Sample Democracies And Other Ideas

These are four duchy-sized quasi-democratic Potentates, suitable for a Fantasy setting. The assumptions are that their society evolved out of a tribal system, and clans still exists; nobility is a foreign concept; status is measured by wealth. The region is mountainous, but the Potentates fare quite well thanks to logging and mining.

Each Potentate has its own ruling system, problems, and tensions. Everywhere, the clans are composed by many large patriarchal families, and have an old clan leader; however, they wield no direct power. However, they often serve as a power basis. Everybody tends to vote for a candidate of his own clan. Candidates will try to obtain the public endorsement of the clans. Yet popularity is an important requisite for being elected, so a successful, popular adventurer might have no less chances than a lavishly-funded puppet.

Rakon

All male citizens of Standard wealth or better vote. The offices are: "King", 50 Assembly Members (law-making powers), Commander (army leader), and Judges. There are also many minor offices, which elsewhere would be covered by public servants, which are also elective (such as Bailiff, Chief Minter or even Surveyor of Water Supplies!). These offices receive token remuneration. The terms are four years (renewable) for the King, shorter varying terms for other offices. With a majority of 26 members, the Assembly can impeach any official, King included, on a charge of incompetence or corruption; real control of Rakon requires this majority. There can be any number of candidates; they must be Wealthy or better, males, and presented by at least 500 citizens. There is a public vote by local clans. Bribery is widespread, and whole clans can be bought. Most Rakonans usually vote for candidates who have sponsored lavish arena games, and who persuasively promise easy life and less taxes. Intrigues and corruption are quite common. No elections are imminent in Rakon, but the current King was elected along with a limited number of Assembly Members of his faction, backed by the four largest merchant houses. His friends hold only 28 seats in the Assembly; should they fall under 25, the King is likely to be accused of corruption (a quite easily proven charge).

Knowledgeable meddlers whisper that King Emeran is going to lose that majority in the Assembly, because his opponents (an odd alliance between smaller merchants, jewelers, and mine concessionaries) are staging a maneuver featuring bribery, intimidation, and blackmailing to have at least four majority Members change sides. If they are successful, the King would be impeached and an extraordinary election should take place. The King is just a handsome face, but his funders are unlikely to accept his dismissal without fighting.

Badais

Here all male citizens of Struggling wealth or better vote. The offices are Ruler and Council (for law-making and advising the Ruler). Judges are appointed for life by the Ruler. Other offices are covered by career officers and public servants. The remuneration is significant. Office terms are three years (renewable). There are four candidates for the office of Ruler, and any number for the Council. If there are more than four would-be candidates, the four who obtain more endorsements by the clans are chosen. Candidates are numbered, and the vote is secret. Badaisans can choose their man for the usual reasons (popularity, endorsement by their clan, sponsoring of games) but also for his ideas and program. Corruption has been relatively uncommon.

This is an election year in Badais, and the political struggle is raging. Politicians and would-be candidates are currently focusing on gaining the support of as many clan leaders as possible. There are three main factions. The "Businessmen" represent the merchant class and the current leadership, and their program is simple: maintaining the status quo, trading with anyone, keeping taxes low and welfare expenses lower. They are well-funded and widely supported in town; they are likely to employ corruption, and they are rumored to have hired mind-controlling wizards from the mysterious East. The "Isolationists" preach that Badais would fare much better by curbing contacts with foreigners and greedy southerners. They disapprove of having peaceful relationships with the barbarians. They plan to implement heavy tolls on imported goods. Unsurprisingly, they are supported by both the Craftsmen's Guilds and the border clans; this faction is the weakest, but it seems the most inclined to strong-arm tactics. They have been recruiting street goons.

The "Traditionalists" support the idea of a return to the clans as pivot of the social life. Their speeches have a populist streak. They also plan to spend more on social issues, and the extremists talk about having even Poor citizens vote. They are supported by the country clans. They are organizing a bodyguard pool, based on clan allegiances, to protect their candidates.

Lefke

All male citizens of Struggling wealth or better vote. The offices are Governor, Lieutenant, and Judge, all not remunerated. The Governor chooses his aides and appoints a Council for law-making. Terms are for three seasons (six for the Judge). There can be any number of candidates, with no requirements; no law states they must be males. The voting is public in small constituencies. In this way, the local boss might intimidate the voters, but corruption is not widespread. Lefkeans usually vote for the most popular or eloquent candidate, and for the man whom they think will be able to defend them from barbarians.

However, Ros Sakani, a chauvinistic and charismatic clan leader, has begun putting the blame of all setbacks and problems of the Potentate on the Renzi clan. The traditional rivalry of the two neighboring clans has polarized all aspects of the current election campaign. Everybody had to take sides: all other lesser clans, the candidates, the Guilds. Even the Watch is split between the two clans, which makes it useless to keep the peace; as election day is coming closer, more and more inflaming speeches are delivered. Interestingly, Ros is running for Lieutenant; if he wins, he'd have to defer to the Governor -- but he'd be in direct control of the Army, Militia, and Watch.

Hirina

This isn't exactly a democracy; the voters are male citizens older than 30, of Comfortable wealth or better . . . which is a small minority. There is only a Senate (the Senators elect a Prince of Senate among themselves, as ruler, and appoint other officials), and Senators receive no remuneration. Terms are six years (renewable). There can be any number of candidates; they must be male citizens older than 40, and are usually at least Wealthy. There is a public vote in the Voters' Assembly. Votes are cast for favors, clan allegiance, or personal acquaintance with the candidate (since the eligible pool is so small). Bribery is possible. Elections are four years away, but the current problem in Hirina is that a few Senators are advocating some form of representation for Standard-wealth citizens; one of them, Airus Rongoni, is also suggesting that the appalling conditions of the slaves working in the logging camps should be improved. Of course, according to most other Senators, Airus is a dangerous madman, and his friends are populists who chose this course of action because their families' fortunes are ebbing and they themselves are on the brink of losing their Status. On the other hand, plebeians are certainly discontented, and who knows what slaves think?

Pyramid Review

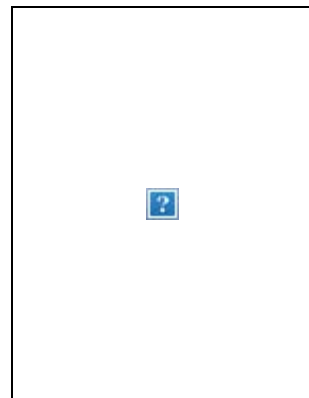
Operation: Jungle Drums -- Redux (for *Heavy Gear*)

Published by [Dream Pod 9](#)

Written by Elie Charest

Art by Ghislain Barbe, Marc Ouellette and David Paquin

48 B&W pages; \$12.95US



One of the first supplements for the game, *Operation: Jungle Drums* is in many ways the archetypal *Heavy Gear* adventure. *Operation: Jungle Drums -- Redux* is a new, expanded edition, available after several years during which the original version was out of print.

The introductory chapter explains some of the background of the "Redux" edition, and offers advice on using the SIU in *Heavy Gear*, for both roleplayers and tactical gamers. The book sets the action in TN 1933, very early on the published *Heavy Gear* timeline, which might be inconvenient for an ongoing campaign. The introduction offers three alternative takes on the adventure for different time periods, in an effort to make it more accessible.

The second chapter is the scenario itself. The adventure is designed for quite high-powered characters and the book recommends building PCs on more points than the typical *Heavy Gear* character. Sample pregenerated characters are provided and would be ideal for a convention game or a quick one-shot. In addition, several of these sample characters, who were the PCs from the designers' original campaign, went on to become major figures in the *Heavy Gear* world. For die-hard *Heavy Gear* fans, this may lend a certain historical interest to the adventure.

Operation: Jungle Drums was intended to introduce both players and GMs to Heavy Gear and DP9's silhouette rules system. To this end, the scenario spans a range of situations utilizing the various aspects of both the roleplaying and tactical Heavy Gear rules. The PCs are members of the elite Special Intervention Unit (SIU) of the Southern MILICIA, sent to investigate a recent spate of attacks on Southern mining shipments. To locate the bandits, they are assigned to escort one of the convoys.

The following events require the PCs to fight off an ambush, deal with local villagers who may or may not be allied with the bandits and penetrate the lair of the villain a man soon to become a powerful force on Terra Nova.

The adventure is well written, with a plot that can branch out in several directions. All these possibilities are covered by the text, though, making it a smooth ride even for an inexperienced GM. The art throughout is of very high quality, as has come to be expected of Dream Pod 9. Much of the artwork relates directly to the scenario and its characters, and would be a fine visual aid during gameplay.

One of the biggest problems is that the scenario could be difficult to insert into an existing *Heavy Gear* campaign, especially if the PCs are not SIU agents, or not likely to work for the SIU. This is offset somewhat by the suggested alternatives given for different time periods, but these are sketchy and would require a lot of work to develop. The best use of *Operation: Jungle Drums* would be as a one-off introduction to the *Heavy Gear* setting or as the very beginning of a new campaign based on the SIU. As a campaign-starter the adventure's ending succeeds admirably, as it opens up questions about the government of the Southern Republic and other factions, all ripe with potential for both skullduggery and action.

The third chapter consists of resources for the GM write-ups of the various NPCs, and four computer-generated maps

for use as player handouts, plus one more for the GM's eyes only. The maps have been printed in the center of the book, which allows them to be simply pulled out for use. Unfortunately, the quality of the maps leaves something to be desired. The grayscale printing is rather murky, especially on the large scale area maps. However, they are by no means useless.

The fourth chapter details the Special Intervention Unit: its history, organization, and past missions. Stats are provided for typical SIU Gear pilots and infantrymen. Of interest is a section describing the SIU's relationships with other institutions in the South's military and intelligence communities.

The fifth chapter contains datacards for the vehicles used in the scenarios and write-ups of the pre-generated PCs. Two pages, with a full-length portrait, are devoted to each. The characters are well thought-out and written, so much so that it could be said the scenario works better using the pregenerated PCs than characters created by the players. The reason for this is that the conflicting personalities of the characters, coupled with their intriguing back-stories, almost provide enough material for a whole other scenario as they play off each other. Having said that, due to the high-profile nature of several of the characters within the *Heavy Gear* game world, this would only be suitable if using *Operation: Jungle Drums* as a one-off adventure. If the characters were to be used as continuing PCs, the information contained in other *Heavy Gear* books would need some tweaking by the GM as the characters' actions began to diverge from the published *Heavy Gear* timeline.

Overall, *Operation: Jungle Drums -- Redux* stands a worthy part of the *Heavy Gear* game line. Although not likely to be workable for an ongoing campaign, the quality of the adventure is excuse enough to run it as an isolated episode. Moreover, the expanded information on the SIU makes the book a much more valuable resource for the Game Master.

--Tom McGrenery

The Art Of Cattle Raiding

by Conall Kavanagh

Cattle have been pivotal to many societies throughout history. The living animal provides milk, traction, manure, and, in some cultures, blood drawn for human consumption. Once slaughtered, the carcass yields meat and leather, as well as bone, horn, and hoof for tools and utensils. Early societies expressed their regard for cattle in diverse forms, ranging from the naturalistic cave paintings at Lascaux to the shrines of the oldest Mediterranean cities, such as those at Çatal Hüyük and Knossos. Perhaps one honor has been bestowed inadvertently: the letter A is thought to derive from a glyph of a bull's head. Cattle have been central to economic systems, as reflected by the word "pecuniary", which stems from the Latin *pecus* ("cattle"). Significantly, the words "fee", "feudal", and "fief" can be traced to the Germanic *feho* ("cattle").

Given these sacred and mundane virtues, it is a safe bet that the formation of the first domestic herd was closely followed by the first act of cattle theft. Indeed, the thieving of cattle stretches back to ancient times. For his Tenth Labor, Heracles lifted the cattle of Geryon. In turn, the giant Cacus stole some of these beasts from Heracles. The Bible also refers to cattle raids. Although the Tenth Commandment warns subsequent generations not to covet their neighbors' oxen, cattle theft has continued with the cattle-rustlers of the Old West and warrior bands of contemporary East Africa.

As a GM or player, you might want to carry out cattle raids in your gaming world, but might be unsure about how to do it. Stealing cattle is not simply slipping through a window and pocketing the treasure. A cattle raid requires a body of men to penetrate enemy territory, gather and secure a frightened group of animals, and return home amid possible retaliatory attacks. This article discusses various mechanics of cattle raiding, including obstacles that might stand between the raiders and the cattle, tactics for approaching and eluding the enemy, and the sizes of raiding parties and captured herds. Two historical examples, the cattle raids of medieval Ireland and 16th century Scotland, serve as useful templates upon which to base guidelines for gaming.

Historical Examples

Cattle raids were regular features of early and later medieval Ireland. Historical accounts and annal entries record raids by kings, petty kings, and lesser nobles between the 9th and 17th centuries. Cattle raids are also described in the literature, the most famous being the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* ("The Cattle Raid of Cooley"). This epic is found in the 12th century manuscript *Lebor na hUidre* (familiarily known as the "Book of the Dun Cow"), but the story's written compilation is thought to date to the 6th to 8th centuries, and its original composition might lie in the first few centuries AD. Cattle figured largely in Irish society, serving as currency for payments to one's lord, legal compensation, bride prices, and dowries. Besides the desire to acquire cattle, Irish raids were also conducted to avenge insult or injury, to exact tribute, or to demonstrate one's martial prowess, which was especially important for young nobles. Information on Irish cattle raids can be found in *Cattle in ancient Ireland* by A. Lucas, *Pagan past and Christian present in early Irish literature* by Kim McCone, *The Irish Wars 1485-1603* by Ian Heath (part of Osprey's "Men-at-Arms" series), and *Cattle-lords and clansmen* by Nerys Patterson.

Another rich source for cattle raiding is the documentation of conflict along the Anglo-Scottish border during the 1500s. This century saw frequent and violent cross-border forays by bands of raiders, or "reivers", from both sides. Hostility between England and Scotland did not prevent interaction and marriage across the Border, however. By the 1500s, many families had English and Scottish branches, and it was not uncommon for the reivers to know those whom they were raiding personally. The reivers were often mounted on small, sturdy horses and armed with lance, saber, and pistol. A reiving party could consist of hundreds or thousands of men, although theft by a few dozen, a handful, or even one man was frequent. The reivers' goals varied from single prized animals to herds to the loot of an entire community. In addition to cattle, reivers took sheep, horses, currency, household goods, and prisoners. Historical records include rather curious spoils, such as four clumps of lead taken from a church. The Border reivers are treated

in the excellent *The Steel Bonnets* by George Fraser. *The Border Reivers* by Keith Durham (another of Osprey's "Men-at-Arms") provides details on the reivers' military tactics.

From these historical sources, cattle raids can be divided into two kinds: large-scale, involving hundreds of men and often long-distance travel; and small-scale, involving many fewer men traveling shorter distances. The Irish information concerns large-scale raids; substantial documentation exists for both kinds of raids along the Border. The goals of both raid types were similar, but the general tactics differed. Small bands of men tended to rely on stealth and secrecy, while very large bands traveled much more openly, often spending several days in enemy territory.

Some of the largest reiving bands along the Anglo-Scottish border brought a few thousand armed men into the neighboring kingdom. These forays should be viewed differently from invasions by more politically motivated armies. Although it is common practice for invading armies to capture the enemy's food source, the invasion is usually driven by a motivation to occupy the enemy's territory or to disrupt or overturn its government. The Border reivers and medieval Irish raiders generally, if not always, returned with their booty to their home territories. Historically, a clear distinction between "raiding" and "political" armies cannot always be made, however. In Europe, several large-scale settlements seem to have been initiated by raids upon foreign lands: the Celts into northern Italy around 400 BC, the Irish along the Welsh coast in the 5th century, and the Vikings in Normandy and Britain.

Knowing The Enemy

To be successful, a raiding party should have a good idea about how the enemy's cattle are arrayed and what measures the enemy has taken to protect them. The Irish law texts and the *Domesday Book* provide information on how cattle were distributed among members of society. The Irish and Anglo-Scottish sources indicate how cattle were generally kept and protected.

Sizes of individual herds. In early medieval Ireland, a fundamental political unit was the petty kingdom. Such a kingdom consisted of roughly 3,000 people on average, living in an area the size of the later feudal barony (50-150 square miles). Within each kingdom, each nuclear family typically comprised an individual household. Households were of three general kinds: royal, noble, and common. The king and his relatives made up the royal dynasty. Nobles loaned cattle and other possessions to clients in exchange for some combination of goods, livestock, food, services, and other obligations. While usually not bound to the king by a contract of clientship, each noble acknowledged the legitimacy of the royal dynasty's claim. Commoners did not have possessions on loan to other households, and usually were the clients of royal or noble households. Table 1 lists the number of cattle that each kind of household possessed.

The *Domesday Book* was compiled in 1086 to give William the Conqueror an estimation of England's taxable assets. It is an invaluable glimpse into the early Middle Ages, and reveals a wealth of information about the size and possessions of settlements. The book describes about 13,300 rural villages and 112 boroughs (larger towns and cities). Each village was a collection of farms, often with a manor house, church, and mill, on land owned by one or more lords. Lords of the villages included Norman and Saxon nobles, clergymen, and the King himself, while villagers were the free peasantry (i.e., freemen and sokemen; 14% of rural households), lower peasantry (i.e., villeins and bordars; 71% of rural households), and miscellaneous classes (e.g., priests, cottars, herdsmen, craftsmen, slaves, etc.; 15% of rural households).

Domesday cattle entries have been summarized for eight counties, amounting to 474 villages. These figures appear in Table 2, along with another prominent animal, sheep. It must be noted that the entries are thought to refer to livestock owned by the lord(s) of the village. To get an idea of a village's total cattle herd, one can speculate that the typical villager had far fewer than 20 head of cattle, perhaps less than six on average. Overall, 191,079 low peasant households (villeins and bordars) are recorded, along with 36,877 free peasant households (freemen and sokemen). These figures yield crude ratios of 14 low peasant and 3 free peasant households per village. Multiplying these 17 households by the factors of 2, 4, and 6 cattle per household gives 34, 68, and 102 cattle for the village, respectively. Combining these estimates with the overall county mean of 19 cattle owned by the village lord(s) produces a range of 50-120 cattle for an "average" village, not including cattle owned by priests and the other villager classes.

Keeping And Guarding The Cattle

Irish sources provide details about how the cattle were routinely kept and guarded. Neighbors and relatives often cooperatively grazed their cattle. By day, boys usually tended the cattle, possibly with small herder dogs and larger guard dogs. Some beasts were fitted with bells to continuously signal their location. At night, or at the approach of danger, the animals were brought into an enclosure. Early medieval Irish households generally consisted of a cluster of structures (like living quarters, storage huts, animal shelters, and garden plots) enclosed by some form of fortification. Cattle were kept in the central green of the homestead, or in a special pen or corral. Royal households included a feasting hall and were enclosed by a stone or earthen palisade and ditch. They might be situated on top of hills or promontories. Noble homesteads could be just as fortified as those of royal families. Commoners were more likely to have a wooden palisade or a perimeter of chopped brush to protect their property. One or two night watchmen ordinarily stood guard against raiders and wolves, and guard dogs might lay with the cattle. It was the watchmen's duty to raise alarm at the approach of raiders.

In medieval England, villages often contained the lord's manor house. From the late 1100s through the 1300s, these houses became increasingly fortified with walls and moats, thereby providing protection to the villagers' cattle in the event of attack. Similarly, the Irish texts reveal that the headman of a kin group might maintain a stone or earthen palisade, and his less-fortified kinsmen would bring their livestock into his ring-fort in emergencies.

A more pre-emptive stance against raiders is to actively patrol the territory's borders and roads. Such patrols are likely to spot large raiding parties far enough in advance to give the settlement sufficient time to respond. The Anglo-Scottish borders provide an example of a warning system of beacons, where one beacon signifies that raiders are coming, two beacons mean that raiders are coming quickly, and four beacons signal the approach of a large band of raiders. Given enough time, the people of the settlement might move the herds to places of safety, such as local forts and castles, or even natural refuges, such as forests, peninsulas, valleys, hills, or islands. An allied neighboring tribe or the sanctuary of a local church might also serve as a temporary haven from raiding.

The settlement might also choose to confront the raiders. This decision depends upon several factors, especially the size of the raiding party and the time available to muster a defense. If the mustering spot is no more than one or two miles from a good number of homesteads, then a decent fighting force can assemble fairly quickly. Incessant warfare and raiding can turn populations into communities of "minutemen"; a Scottish Borderer once reckoned that 350 horsemen could be assembled in 30 minutes. All able-bodied men should be expected to respond to a call to repel raiders. At full strength, the number of mustered men amounts to 20-35% of the total population. Julius Caesar provides a specific example. After his defeat of the Helvetii confederation in 58 BC, he reported that it numbered 368,000 people, 92,000 of which were men capable of bearing arms (25%). Of course, women warriors in gaming worlds will significantly boost this percentage.

Raiding parties should also be aware of where the cattle might be according to the time of year. In the pre-Industrial British Isles, cows gave birth in the spring. Early in the summer, a common practice was outland grazing, where the cattle were grazed in lush meadows beyond the houses and fields of the settlement. The men stayed in the settlements to tend and defend the growing crops. The women and children took the cattle to the grazing lands, which might be nearby hills, highlands, or riverside meadows. Here, the women and girls milked the cows, and the boys herded the animals by day and led them to an enclosure at dusk. Having the women and children with the cattle on the fringes of the settlement stresses the importance of a system to detect and respond to approaching raiders. The summer grazing ended with the autumn harvest; the cattle were returned to the settlements, and some were slaughtered. In regions with harsh winters, the cattle were housed in roofed stalls and fed hay until early spring. Milder winters enabled the animals to graze outdoors during the day.

Large-Scale Raids

These are raids conducted by hundreds or thousands of men, often over considerable distances. The composition of these raiding parties can be grouped into at least three categories. First, kings or nobles might lead the raiders. In medieval Ireland, cattle raiding was the duty and privilege of the royalty and nobility. In order to lead a raid, a king or

noble first calls out his clients and fellow nobles, who, in turn, gather their clients. Married, landed men go on these raids as part of contracts with their lords. The frequency and length of service are commonly defined in the lord-client contract. There can be a wide diversity of terms, and the GM and players should not be shy about wrangling the best terms possible for their respective parties. For example, contracts within the kingdom might obligate a client to raid with his lord one week per year for every cow loaned. Alternatively, a lord might require less military service in exchange for more food renders. Contracts between a petty king and an overking involve similar terms. Besides the length and frequency of service (for example, one fortnight every year), the contract might require the subordinate king to join the overking's raid only in certain months or only against certain enemies.

A historical example gives an impression of how frequently a king might raid his enemies. Toirrdhealbhadh ó Conchobhair ("Turlough O'Connor") was king of Connacht from 1106 to 1156. He led 27 documented raids from 1111 through 1154, for a rate of roughly one raid every year and a half. The majority of these raids were in territories more than 50 miles from his kingdom. His raiding parties drove cattle in order to provide food along the way.

Raids might also be conducted by bands of young men who are usually unmarried and unlanded. In many European, Near Eastern, African, and Native American societies, raiding was a primary mechanism for young men to obtain capital (like cattle, horses, and gold) for purchasing brides and setting up homes, as well as gaining reputations of valor and martial prowess. In these cultures, warrior-bands of young men often lived apart from settled society for periods of time, living by hunting and raiding. European examples include Fionn mac Cumhaill ("Finn mac Cool") and his troop of *fianna* ("fenians"). Viking raiding expeditions often lasted for three years and commonly consisted of many young unmarried men. In Irish writings, an air of suspicion and distrust hovers over the exploits of *fian*-bands. In some cases, they are called the "sons of death" who overrun kingdoms "in the manner of pagans." Yet the youths of the *fian*-bands, as well as those of the Viking expeditions, were expected to eventually marry and settle down. In Irish sagas, nobles and kings spent their youths in *fian*-bands, as did their sons. Indeed, upon coming of age, a noble youth might be expected to demonstrate his prowess by leading a raid into enemy territory. This was especially true of a new king; the Irish even had a specific term for the inaugural raid lead by a new king: *creach rígh* ("the king's raid").

The third category of raiders comprises outlaws, those that have been ostracized from their natal communities. These are often vagrant bands, raiding for subsistence, and plundering anything and everything of value. Outlaws might be romantic figures such as Robin Hood and his Merry Men, or the crueler gangs of bandits and desperadoes of the Old West. The latter type of outlaw is mean and nasty, given to wanton destruction.

Whatever their composition, large raiding parties generally cannot rely upon stealth, so do best by traveling during the day. In temperate regions, the best conditions occur in late spring, summer, and early autumn. This period affords the most daylight hours for movement as well as relatively dry ground. Anticipating the return trip, raiding in the late summer is advantageous in that the great majority of the enemy's cows will have given birth by this time, and the calves will have had the spring and early summer to feed and strengthen themselves.

Focusing on the beginning of the raid, the raiding party will send out scouts when traveling over unfamiliar terrain. In the Irish *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, Medb ("Meave") of Connacht sent two pairs of scouts ahead of her army of over 20,000 footmen and charioteers as she moved toward Ulster. Scouts might also spy on specific targets. In the Irish *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* ("The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel"), a prince observes the occupants of the hostel before his combined force of Irish and British brigands attack it.

As discussed earlier, large raiding parties are likely to be detected by the enemy some time in advance. The enemy may then hide or move its cattle to protected areas as well as confront the raiders. The GM might opt to play out armed resistance by the enemy under rules for battles or skirmishes. If the raiders defeat the enemy forces, the GM might choose to play out the herding of the enemy's cattle by simple rules. For example, the raiders might capture a certain proportion of the enemy's cattle, say a percentile roll, modified by the size and organization of the raiding party, obstacles leading to the cattle (like treacherous ravines, log-strewn valleys, or boggy marsh flats), or continual harassment and pricking by the enemy. It should be noted that in summer raids the cattle might be dispersed in the enemy's summer grazing pastures, and so will not be as concentrated as in late autumn and winter. Herding such dispersed cattle will add time to the raid, possibly enough time for the enemy to launch a second major attack or to allow allied neighboring troops to arrive.

The actual round-up of the enemy's cattle might be a massive plundering by the raiding party as one unit, or several simultaneous forays by branches of the main party. In several Irish cattle raids of the 1500s, the raiding party established a base camp near enemy territory and sent out smaller bands in different directions. Such a strategy would appear to be the most effective in gathering herds that are scattered across grazing areas.

With regard to the number of cattle owned by the enemy, a crude estimate of 10,000 cattle for an Irish petty kingdom of 3,000 people can be derived from Table 1, assuming five people per household. For the *Domesday* survey, using a rough average of 100 cattle per village yields 73,000 cattle for densely populated counties such as Norfolk, 44,400 cattle for moderately populated counties such as Essex, and 34,200 cattle for sparsely populated counties such as Staffordshire. Records of 54 large-scale Irish raids between 985 and 1652 AD provide concrete numbers of captured animals: seized cattle range from 40 to 6,000, with the average being about 1,300. For large herds, reasonable demographic figures are 50-60% of the herd being females of one year or older, 10-20% being calves (males and females less than one year old), 5% being breeding bulls, and the remainder being oxen (castrated males).

Additional spoils might be swept up in the raid. Sheep were valued for their wool, and were often taken along with cattle in Ireland and Britain. The Irish law texts give the impression that roughly equal numbers of sheep and cattle were kept. Archaeological digs from this period in Ireland, however, reveal that an average of 40% of animal remains are cattle, while 20% are sheep. Similarly, cattle comprise roughly 50% of remains at sites from Anglo-Saxon England. The situation is reversed in the *Domesday Book*, where an average of 15 sheep is recorded per cattle over all counties (Table 2). Other booty, such as horses, precious metals and prisoners, might be captured at the GM's discretion. Furthermore, the raiders might destroy houses and forts, burn crops, and attack the enemy regardless of any resistance given.

Footmen, typically armed with long spears, are important in rounding up the beasts and driving them off; footmen are shown in depictions of Irish and Scottish raids in the 1500s. That footmen played fundamental roles in cattle raids is also reflected in the emphasis on rigorous tests of running ability for initiation into Fionn's *fianna*. Royal and noble leaders of raids are often mounted, or even on chariots, as in *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. Being mounted confers an advantage in initially rounding up the cattle and chasing down strays, but does not speed up the raiding party's return trip; cattle simply cannot be run as horses can. Thus the rate of the return trip is that of a quick walk for most of the journey, or roughly two or three miles per hour on good ground. In commercial cattle drives of 18th and 19th century Scotland, cattle were driven 200 miles southward at the rate of 10-12 miles per day. The herd was rested at noon and kept overnight at a location with water and pasturage. On long-distance raids, the cattle might be driven at this rate if the raiding party is formidable enough to discourage pursuit or opposition.

Sheep are traditionally more difficult to drive than are cattle or horses. One English reiver's raid illustrates this problem. In 1547, Sir Thomas Carleton raided Dumfriesshire and swept up many cattle and sheep. He pushed far into Scottish territory, and suddenly found the enemy encircling him. He abandoned the slow, unmanageable sheep and was able to drive the cattle roughly 18 miles over the course of one night's retreat.

The raided enemy might elect to pursue the raiding party to recover the stolen cattle. Like the decision to initially confront the raiders, the decision to pursue depends upon the size of the raiding party, the size of and the time taken to muster a pursuing party, and the behavior of the raiders (for example, the raided population might be more likely to pursue in order to recover any captured tribesmen or to avenge injuries and deaths). Mounted pursuers can obviously travel faster than the raiders, who are constrained by the speed of the livestock. The horsemen of the raiding party can protect the flanks and rear of the herd and its drivers. Lightly armed horsemen (with bows, slings, javelins, or firearms) can hinder or harry a body of pursuers. A combined squad of horse and foot can set an ambush for the pursuers, which was a favorite tactic among the Border reivers. Such a squad might fight to merely slow down or actually repel the pursuers. Irish documents record 135 raids between 1000 and 1600 AD in which the raiders fought their pursuers. In 76 cases, the raiders were worsted by the pursuers; in 33 cases, the raiders defeated the pursuers; in the remaining 26 cases, the victor of the skirmish was not clear.

If not in a great hurry to return, perhaps because of the size and prowess of his raiding party, the victorious raider might add apparent insult to injury by staying in the enemy's territory for a short while, grazing his newly acquired cattle. This makes good economic sense, because it feeds the cattle at the enemy's expense while the raiders' pastures

recover.

Once safe from pursuit, the time eventually comes to divide up the captured herd. The king or noble takes a share for himself, which might be up to one-third of the spoils, and then distributes the remainder among his clients and peers. These men take their cut, and then give portions to any of their clients. Each client's share may be stipulated in his contract with his lord. A rough rule-of-thumb is that clients that participated in the raid get equal shares from their lords, perhaps at least two cows per raider. Non-raider clients may get a smaller share at the lord's discretion. A king or noble might also give "men of respect" within the kingdom a share of the plunder; a reasonable figure is one cow for each such person. Saints were not above accepting tribute from "lawful" raids (*i.e.*, raids not conducted against a church or an allied tribe); several Irish saints regularly expected a cow from every raid conducted by local nobles. With regard to contracts between kingdoms, petty kings could claim rather large shares from their overkings. A historical example dates to the early medieval period: the Irish kingdom of Airgialla was entitled to one-third of the spoils taken by its Uí Néill overlord. Less stratified raiding parties, such as bands of young men or outlaws, might be more egalitarian in dividing the booty, although they will most likely have a few leaders who might take two shares each while all other members receive one share.

The safe return of the successful raiding party raises the question of whether the raided enemy will conduct a retaliation raid. As with the decision to pursue the raiders, this depends upon the relative sizes of the two forces and upon the raider's behavior during the raid. The honor and reputation of the raided territory also play large roles, especially if the raiders are traditional enemies. Naturally, those who lose animals to a raid will demand that their lord and fellow tribesmen help recover the beasts. Contracts between lords and clients might even stipulate such "insurance" clauses with respect to raided livestock.

Small-Scale Raids

These are raids carried out by small bands, say less than 100 men, and as few as one or a half-dozen. The actual size of the band is not critically important. What is important is that the raiding party is too small to overcome the organized defense of the enemy. Thus, small groups of raiders must rely more on stealth and speed than a show of overwhelming force. The size of the raiding party also influences the amount of loot to be taken. Obviously, a party of several hundred raiders can drive a much larger herd than can a party of six. Bands of young, unmarried men and outlaws tend to raid in small groups, especially if these groups rely on frequent thefts of livestock for their subsistence.

For small bands, raiding at night confers several advantages. The darkness provides cover, the enemy is asleep, and the cattle are gathered for the night. On familiar ground, the raiders can even venture forth on moonless nights. For nighttime raids, autumn to early winter are optimal months, because the nights are long and the young cattle are strong. Late winter to early spring is less ideal; weather will be fouler, snow will give away the raiders' tracks, and the cows will be in later stages of pregnancy.

Preying upon the cattle in the summer grazing lands is attractive, because the women and children are usually with the cattle. Weighing against this advantage is the realization that the summer herds are often in difficult terrain, which will slow the raiders' herding operation and initial return. Also, access to the summer grazing lands might be restricted to a valley pass or river ford, at which the assembled men of the territory might wait for the raiders.

At the beginning of the raid, the raiders try to take hidden routes that will lead them to the enemy, and they often raid one or a few specific homesteads or herds. A description of the Border reivers' tactics by Leslie, Bishop of Ross, deserves quotation: "They sally out of their own borders, in the night, in troops, through unfrequented by-ways, and many intricate windings. All the day time, they refresh themselves and their horses, in lurking holes they had pitched upon before, till they arrive in the dark at those places they have a design upon. As soon as they have seized upon the booty, they, in like manner, return home in the night, through blind ways, and fetching many a compass." If raiding in unfamiliar territory, the daytime "lurking" includes scouting and spying, at the risk of being detected by the enemy.

Once a target has been selected, the raiders descend upon it as quickly and silently as possible. At night, they very well might take the herders and their sleeping kinsmen by surprise. By day, the raiders might ambush the herd at a vulnerable location, like the edge of forest grove or a river ford. Pouncing upon the herd raises the question of whether

the raiders attack or kill the defenseless enemy, such as sleeping persons or the herd boys. If stealth is essential, then the raiders might silence their victims more effectively through armed intimidation followed by bounding and gagging rather than through noisy bloodshed. Slaying helpless victims also leads to moral problems, depending upon the raiders' culture. The GM should roleplay these raids at the level of the individual player characters, especially if a small raiding party preys upon one or a few enemy households.

The amount of cattle taken depends upon the status of the target household. Raiders might selectively hit royal or noble households, which gains glory as well as cattle, or the GM might randomly determine the household type. Gathering the herd might take only a few minutes, especially if the herd is already penned. With regard to driving off the herd, a rule-of-thumb is that each mounted raider can safely drive six beasts, while each footman can drive three. These ratios might seem low, especially when one considers that lone Maasai boys on foot can lead herds of 20 or more cattle through hilly lion country. With raiding, however, the raiders and the animals are not familiar with each other, and the herd is being driven over unfamiliar ground with a sense of urgency.

Raiders may use several tactics to aid their escape. They might rely upon a quick return to safety, which can be accomplished by raiding a nearby enemy to make for a short retreat or by raiding at night to give a headstart. More active measures include covering their tracks as well as the beasts', and setting ambushes or booby-traps for the pursuing party. If the raiders evade pursuit, then they have time to split up the booty. As mentioned previously, bands of young men or outlaws might tend toward an equal division of the spoils, with the leaders possibly taking multiple shares to the other men's one.

The raided enemy is likely to pursue a small band of raiders, although their pursuit might get off to a slow start for night raids. If the pursuing party fails to recover the cattle, then the raided enemy will commonly send a stout posse to strike back at the raiders, if the location of the raiders is known or can be found out. Along the Border, a formal posse system known as the "trod" existed, wherein civilians could legally form gangs to hunt down thieves.

Gaming Ideas

Cattle raiding offers many plot and adventure hooks. The group of player characters is a natural small raiding party, and raids can figure largely in the exploits of young player characters. A raid is a logical way of getting the characters to leave their home territories, and, for the GM, provides a realistic impetus for bringing the characters to planned encounters. Raids can lead to further adventures or campaigns, such as becoming embroiled in feuds or wars. Furthermore, raids can pose moral challenges. For example, the leader of the characters' raiding band might want to kidnap or slaughter the defenseless enemy.

Magic can be worked to aid the raiders. For small raiding parties, particularly useful spells would silence the approach of the raiders as well as the snorts and trampling of the herd. All raiders can benefit from magic that charms or befriends the enemy's beasts, hides or covers the tracks of the fleeing party, and speeds or hastens the party's movement.

Cattle raiding also presents gaming opportunities for the player characters as the raided victim. Raids can motivate characters to retrieve their stolen goods or to avenge injuries or deaths. Indeed, raids are ideal seeds for recurring nemeses. Magic can help to secure the characters' cattle. Charmed animals can watch for raiding parties; a magician's familiar eagle or owl would make for a very effective lookout. Magical protective "hedges" can be placed around herds at night. Successful raiders can be identified and tracked down through the use of augury and scrying devices.

The prospect of gaining cattle through and losing it to brute force may very well pervade the player characters' lives. As young adults, raiding offers a way to get rich and famous quickly. Once landed and with a herd, the character may have less desire to participate in raids. Protecting the herd from raiders may influence the structure and planning of the character's homestead, as well as the character's yearly movements. Gaming campaigns can be considerably enriched through the inclusion of the economic and cultural underpinnings of cattle raiding.

Table 1: Number Of Cattle Per Household According To Early Medieval

Irish Law Texts

Proportion of Society Cows

Royal Households	less than 5%	at least 30, up to 100 or more
Noble Households	20-25%	10-30
Common Households	70-80%	up to 30, usually 6-20

Number of females that are one year or older. These numbers are taken directly from the texts; the following figures for calves, bulls, and oxen are estimated. The number of calves should be 20-40% of the number of cows; this value should be evenly split between male and female calves. Large herds (say, above 10 cows) contain one or two breeding bulls. The number of oxen (castrated males) varies according to household type. Royal households may have as many oxen as cows, and noble households should have at least eight oxen. Some common households have up to 10 oxen, although many have only one or two, and must combine their oxen with those of other households to form heavy plough teams.

Table 2: Number Of Cattle And Sheep Per Village¹ In The *Domesday Book*

	# Villages	Avg. # Cattle per Village (min/max)	# Villages	Avg. # sheep per village (min/max)	Avg. # sheep per cattle in village (min/max)
Cornwall & Devonshire	220	22 (1-137)	94	182 (25-700)	9.4 (2.0-90.0)
Somerset, Dorset, & Gloucestershire	82	16 (2-58)	29	275 (60-1,037)	29.6 (5.0-188.5)
Essex	57	21 (1-147)	23	256 (100-683)	12.2 (2.3-42.7)
Suffolk	58	15 (2-37)	31	195 (12-1,000)	12.6 (0.5-40.0)
Norfolk	57	15 (1-203)	13	448 (20-2,300)	35.3 (1.5-143.8)
TOTAL	474	19 (1-203)	190	225.7 (12-2,300)	15.1 (0.5-188.5)

¹ These figures presumably refer to cattle owned by the lord(s) of the village. Most entries for bovines are translated as "cattle." Some entries, fewer than 15% of the total, record numbers of "cows", "calves", and/or "oxen." Suffolk entries record "beasts", which are cattle.

² A subset of the "Villages with cattle entries."

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Murphy's Rules



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Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



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Drive to the East

by Phil Masters

I don't think that it's any great secret how [GURPS Castle Falkenstein: The Ottoman Empire](#) came to be. Back when the original *Castle Falkenstein* was first published by R. Talsorian Games, I approached them as a freelancer to discuss working on the line, and (no doubt partly because of my previous work on [GURPS Arabian Nights](#)), I landed the job of writing the necessary book on the major Middle Eastern power of that world. However, the company and the line hit problems and largely disappeared from public view before my work could see print. All that reached the public were a few sections of the book which I extracted and sold to *Pyramid* (with RTG's permission, of course).

Then, a couple of years later, Jim Cambias and I were commissioned to write [GURPS Castle Falkenstein](#), which incorporated a few snippets from work which both of us had done on the old RTG game. In the wake of that, persuading Steve Jackson Games to provide a home for my old manuscript seemed only logical. That said, my commission from RTG had been for a 96-page book, whereas the minimum standard for *GURPS* volumes these days is of course 128; on the other hand, it was only logical to add comprehensive *GURPS* materials to this new version, and those along with a few added details easily made up the difference in word count. All this took a little time and effort, and I think that the results were worth it.

Thus it is that Steve Jackson Games are publishing the first completely new book for *Castle Falkenstein* in several years. However, I hope that it will be of use to more than players of that specific game or *GURPS Castle Falkenstein*. With the recent minor boom in Victorian- era and especially steampunk games (facilitated not least by the admirable [GURPS Steampunk](#)), a little attention to the fringes of the late Victorian world seems justified.

And things don't get much fringier than the 19th century Ottoman Empire. It was scary how much I *didn't* have to make up for this project. With mad sultans, scheming viziers, huge and pointless wars, revolting Bedouin, eccentric or aristocratic European travelers, bold (or crazed) railroad projects, bandits, spies, harem girls, and dervishes, this was definitely one of those places that was, as the saying goes, manufacturing more history than it could consume locally. Unfortunately, it kept trying to consume it anyway, as it held the outside world in disdain. Adding flying carpets, *Arabian Nights* djinn, and a cinematic sensibility to this supersaturated solution caused a lot of bizarre shapes to crystalize out. And it's a plain fact that GMs playing non- *Falkenstein* Victorian games will probably only need to subtract or modify a few specific elements to get something useful for themselves.

That said, being a relatively backward area, the Ottoman Empire tends to come out a little light on the Steampunk side of Fantastical Victoriana. Which is not to say that steampunk features can't be inserted with a little effort. By way of illustration, here's an idea which I never got around to developing for the book, though it arises logically enough from something in my text.

The Ottoman Landfortress Program

The Prussians are pretty determined to keep their uncertain allies in Istanbul sweet, so when Sultan Abdul Aziz *kept* importuning them to sell him some of the giant war machines which he'd so admired on his visit to their country, they eventually felt that they had to do *something*. So their engineers dug out some experimental early-generation designs, scoured the rust off their armor, added working guns, dismantled them, shipped them down by rail a bit at a time, and presented the reassembled vehicles to Abdul Aziz with much pomp and ceremony.

(Backtracking a bit, the shipping process could be an opportunity for a scenario or two in itself. Did the Prussians bully

the other states through which the components traveled into letting these weapons shipments pass, or did they just not mention the uses to which these "heavy machine parts" would be put? Could the Second Compact expose the secret and cause trouble, or maybe sneak aboard the cargo trains for a detailed examination of Prussian armored vehicle technology, or a little light sabotage? Or would it be better to just let the whole thing go, because quite frankly, even the Prussian engineers reckon that the whole idea will just end in tears *without* any help from third parties?)

So now the Ottomans have landfortresses -- three of them, which they've named the *Angora*, the *Izmir*, and the *Trebizond*. Of course, they don't have properly trained crews, and the few half-competent Turkish steam engineers are now run ragged between these and the Sultan's equally unhappy modern navy, but the neighbors and some semi-independent Arabian towns are still a little worried. The Bedouin nomad rebels of the desert, on the other hand, are laughing themselves silly. In the event of serious warfare involving the Ottoman fortresses, agents aiding their opponents should have some time to study, assess, and sabotage these things as they clatter towards the front. If our heroes feel that it's necessary to *aid* the Turks, on the other hand, their best bet might be to persuade them not to rely on their beloved war machines, or to keep them "in reserve" as a psychological weapon or a distraction for the enemy. Turkish PCs may see them as a symbol of national pride, or yet another indication of the need to reform the government.

Spahi Class Light Landfortress (Castle Falkenstein Version)

Cost: 56 days at 5,600c

Size: Large [120 wounds]

Powered By: Steam Engines

Operation Time: 6 Hours

Controlled by: A Complex and Intricate Arrangement of Levers and Metal Cables and a Captain's Wheel

Moves with: Clanking Metal Treads with lots of Gears and Driving Wheels

Armed with: Gatling Gun (x1), Artillery Guns (x2)

Note: The *Castle Falkenstein* supplement *Steam Age* notes that the time to build a machine calculated from the main rulebook's design system is in *days*, not weeks. As a first attempt at anything on these lines for many on the design team, this vehicle was treated as the product of someone with *Good Tinkering*. Also because of its experimental and imperfect design, it was treated as being built of iron (rather than steel or armor plate) when determining its wounds rating.

Spahi Class Light Landfortress ([GURPS Vehicles](#) Version)

(For explanations of the following design format, see *GURPS Steampunk* or other recent supplements.)

Subassemblies: Body +5, right top Turret +2, left top Turret +2, two Tracks +4.

Power & Propulsion: 300 kW Forced-Draft Steam Engine w/tracked drivetrain.

Fuel: 72 cf coal, 4 hours.

Occupancy: 2 NCS, 6 NS, 2 NCS [Tur]

Cargo: 20 cf

Armor F RL B T U

Body: 4/40 4/40 4/18 4/18 4/18

Tur: 4/20 4/20 4/20 4/20 4/20

Trk: 4/30 4/30 4/30 4/30 4/30

Weaponry

2 x 105mm Naval Gun [Tur:F] (6 SAPLE each)

1 x 37mm Gatling [Bo:F] (200 solid)

Equipment

Body: TL5 Navigation Instruments.

Statistics

Size: 12.5'x10'x15.25' *Payload:* 6,476 lbs. *Lwt.:* 98,195 lbs.
Volume: 2,453 cf *SizeMod:* +5 *Price:* \$14,261.81
HT: 10 *HP:* 2,275 [Body] 809 [Trk] 361 [Tur]
gSpeed: 25 *gAccel:* 2 *gDecel:* 20 *gMR:* 0.25 *gSR:* 6

Low GP. Off-Road Speed: 17 mph. Service Interval: 53 hours.

Design Notes: This vehicle was designed at TL5, with the addition of a very experimental tracked drivetrain with double weight (and hence volume and cost) for its power rating as compared to the TL6 standard. It uses a heavy structure and standard materials throughout. The total vehicle cost was divided by 10, in accordance with the rule on p.120 of *GURPS Castle Falkenstein*. The weapons installed in the design are detailed in *GURPS Vehicles*.

Each Light Landfortress in Ottoman service suffers from several bugs, as described on p.198-9 of *GURPS Vehicles*. The exact list can vary from vehicle to vehicle, at the GM's whim; *Restricted Visibility* (to the rear) is inherent in the design, and *Hangar Queen* is virtually mandatory (reducing the above service interval by 10-60%). A single vehicle might well also have *Complex Controls*, *Very Poor Handling*, and *Weak Brakes*. A more serious treatment of the idea could have fewer problems; the design concept isn't pointless, just poorly executed in this case.

Although the design can maintain top speed for only 4 hours, it can "cruise" at half power for twice that, achieving 17 mph on the road or 11 mph off; this is its normal "campaign speed" (if it can get the coal).

General Comments

This design lacks any kind of internal cooling system (no "Environmental Control," in *GURPS* terms), which means that it goes from merely impractical to seriously hellish for the crew in very warm regions, at least unless they keep all the hatches open. However, "air conditioning" could be added in place of some cargo space (and keeping the cooling systems working would then become the first priority for the mechanics). In fact, given that the vehicle was only designed for short occupancy, the crew will need to get out and stretch their legs (as well as running maintenance) distressingly often.

The Light Landfortress is a simple box with two rectangular limited-rotation turrets on the front corners. Both turret cannons are can only fire in a 180 degree forward arc; yes, they do inevitably obstruct each other when attempting level fire to the sides. The vehicle also has a single rotary ("mechanical gatling") gun in a forward casemate mount (giving a 90 degree arc of fire). If attacked from the rear, either the vehicle has to maneuver hastily, or the crew have to pop hatches and blaze away with sidearms. The design has carrying space for 12 shells for the main guns and 200 rounds for the gatling; these are carried in the main body, where the loaders work -- only the gunners are actually seated in the turrets. These vehicles often have to be supported by extensive baggage trains carrying ammunition as well as coal and sometimes water. Desert expeditions aren't really a practical idea.

Actually, on paper, the *Spahi* class has its virtues; it's relatively fast (even off-road), fairly hard to hurt, and intimidatingly noisy. Unfortunately, even aside from the fact that it will require logistical support which the Ottoman Empire just isn't equipped to provide, it's vulnerable to lucky *rifle* fire from the rear, and to courageous, well-handled artillery from any quarter. Even with its broad tracks, it might well get bogged down in soft sand, and its systems aren't "ruggedized." While it could roll right through any band of desert rebels or Balkan irregulars who were foolish enough to take it on in pitched battle on level ground, it's a natural victim for the sort of irregular warfare, sabotage, or cunning plans which are the natural province of PCs.

Pyramid Review

Seven Cities (for *d20*)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Matt Forbeck

Illustrated by Steven Sanders (cover), Michael Clarke, John Davis, Brian Figur and Jennifer Meyer

Cartography by John Davis, Rob Lee and Scott Reeves

144-page perfect bound softback; \$21.95

Getting straight down to the facts, *Seven Cities* maintains the high standards that we have come to expect from Penumbra, the *d20* imprint published by Atlas Games. It is well-written by Matt Forbeck, the co-founder of Pinnacle Entertainment Group and creator of such notable games as *Brave New World* and editor on several lines for *Deadlands: The Weird West Roleplaying Game*. It has some nice pieces of artwork, some of which have an almost Dickensian feel to them. It is laid out in the Penumbra house style, and -- like other Penumbra titles -- comes with an extraordinarily easy to use set of indices that list Community Stats, NPC Stats, Magic Items, Traps, and Miscellaneous items.

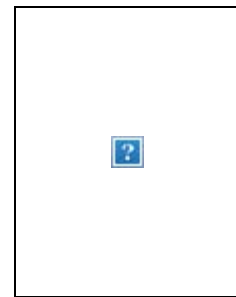
The maps in the supplement are particularly good; individual buildings are nice and clear, but with a pleasingly rough feel to them. The maps of the towns are also good, but as the towns grow in size their individual layouts do feel a little too regular and perhaps possess too much of a grid pattern to their street plan. Yet this is really no more than a quibble.

Seven Cities discusses the creation of inhabited settlements and presents seven of their ilk. In fact the title is a bit of a misnomer, since only two actual cities are described in this supplement. Instead, it presents seven populated places, each of a greater size than the one before it, beginning with thorp and proceeding up through hamlet, village, small and large towns before finishing with a small city and a large one. Although the size and nature of the metropolis is discussed in the introduction to *Seven Cities*, its population of twenty-five thousand people or more is deemed far too large to fall within the scope of this book.

The introduction looks at the nature of mostly human settlements and what they require. This includes suitable legal and religious authorities, what goods might be bought and sold there, what type of NPC healers and spellcasters might live there and be prepared to cast their spells or apply their healing salves (for a fee, of course), and what calamities might befall these communities, including, war, pestilence, fire, and the weather. Finally, a series of tables break the type and number of each class that might reside in each type of community.

Each entry follows a similar presentation, beginning with an overview, the settlement's history and power center, its method of self-defence (if any), several notable locations within the community, and three plot ideas ready for the GM to develop. Once they have grown to town sized or larger, these settlements are broken up into neighborhoods or quarters, described separately. In general, as the settlement size grows, the descriptive focus broadens and the number of individual locations detailed lessens; this is to the advantage of the GM, however, who thus has more space in which to add their own details.

All of the communities are of Lawful alignment (either Lawful Good or Lawful Neutral), and the bulk of their peoples



are humans; elves are quite common, however, with Dwarves, Gnomes, and Halflings slightly less so. Few NPCs are fully detailed, with most being merely abbreviated with enough information should the GM need it. The lesser character classes are used extensively, such as Commoner, Adept, Aristocrat, Expert, and so on. The larger locales tend to have NPCs of the player-type classes.

There is a singular feature that runs through all of these places, and quite literally so: the Rock River. These seven locales are all connected by this important river, as well as by one or two NPCs that travel from one place to another. Where religion is discussed the gods are described in a generic way -- such as the god of the sky or valor -- rather than a deity specific to any one setting.

[SPOILER ALERT]

The first of the entries is the thorp (actually the old Norse name for a village or hamlet) Lorantan, located at a fordable point on the river and centered around a trading post built and run by the thorp's founder, the elf Glothloren. Further downstream, the river is crossed by a wooden bridge at Volage, a hamlet dominated by a family of the same name. At the village of Seguentelin -- the name being Elvish for bridge -- a stone bridge crosses the river. It has grown up from a thorp and then a hamlet; although it does not know it, the village is beset by a lycanthrope.

Founded by a priestess of the earth goddess, the small town of Rockton is still run by descendants in what has become a hereditary theocracy. Although other faiths are allowed, it is the worship of the earth goddess that still dominates. The town is quite prosperous and even has its own small opera house. Other more interesting locations include an inn whose piracy theme has more than a grain of truth to it -- even if the former seadogs are retired!

The large town of Blackston is actually a small principality, ruled by Prince Jadit Schtein VII, the fifteenth descendant of the founder who had been exiled from his home by his brother, the king. To this day, the exiled family is not welcome in their cousin's seat. Blackston possess relatively few defenses, but with a gladiatorial arena of its own, does have something of a martial tradition.

Battle City is named after the site of a famous battle and grew out of a very defensible island in the river. This small city is still ruled by a capable warrior known as the "Heroes' King" and appointed by the Heroes' Council, based upon the warrior's capability. Another important center of power in the city is the Arcane College, which tutors those wishing to become sorcerers or wizards. Unlike many of the prior settlements, Battle City has a thriving Thieves Guild and even has a church devoted to the god of rogues!

The last entry is the large city of Solamber -- meaning "city of the sun" in Elvish -- which sits on an island where the Rock River splits and flows into Lake Aveneg. Although still ruled by its elven Paladin/Wizard, both he and the city have an antithesis in the form of the Night Lady, a Drow cleric/wizard, who has managed to take control of one of the city's quarters, Nightville. There are relatively few locations detailed in this chapter, so a GM will be able to add as many as they would like.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Should the GM want to create cities of their own from the ground up, then *Seven Cities* is probably not all that useful, even though the information given in the introduction is solid enough. Yet where the author of *Seven Cities* has been rather clever is in making the book do two disparate things well at no cost to either. First, it acts a set of locations that the GM can pick and plunder from to utilize to their heart's content. Second, it can be left as is, and used as a series of settlements along the Rock River, ready for the player characters to explore and interact with, or even use as a base of operations. All that the GM needs to do is locate the river valley upon their campaign map and begin any details that they might want. Either way, the contents of *Seven Cities* is generic enough for a GM to map the particular details of their world onto, whether it is one of their own creations or one pulled off the shelf of the local games store.

--Matthew Pook

(with thanks to Roj at Wayland's Forge)

Powers and Pimples

It has been said that just about every White Wolf game is, at some level, a metaphor for puberty. You're going along in life, thinking everything is fine, until WHAMMO! Everything changes, and you're forced to view the world in an entirely different way. As new feelings and drives flow through your body, you realize that the cute schoolmate you were passing notes to mere years earlier is, in fact, a mummified chimerical blood-sucking werewolf that can alter reality from the afterlife.

Or something like that.

Anyway, this week we're on Part V of our series dealing with PC power levels, and this week we're talking about empowered folks: people with abilities they just plain shouldn't have.

To be honest, this category is perhaps a bit misleading; in being placed in a hierarchy of seemingly escalating abilities, it gives the impression that it is somehow "above" being the pinnacle of human accomplishment. This isn't the case; beyond human abilities are really more of another scale, sliding from "no powers" up to "Drat! The bean burrito I had for lunch blew up Neptune!" This scale can easily apply to any of the other abilities presented; you can be an otherwise an otherwise completely incompetent person with a phenomenal ability, or an exceptionally skilled FBI agent with a minor supernatural quirk.

But there *is* a common phenomenon here; regardless of the magnitude, this category deals with folks who do things ordinary humans can't. Whether this means creating stars or getting a group of six random people to agree on pizza toppings, they are still capable of doing the impossible . . . that impossibility, ultimately, sets them apart from humanity.

It is that impossibility that usually provides the thrust of character interactions; for those aspects where the powers *don't* come into play, all the previous advice in the first four parts dealing with ordinary folks will hopefully be useful. But when it comes to bringing some depth to those abilities, here are some ideas to keep in mind.

How common are the abilities? A world where half the population is able to communicate telepathically is likely to view those abilities much differently than a world where there is only one mind reader. This should also affect how the hero views himself; your sense of worth, responsibility, and world view are likely to be quite different if you're the last Jedi, versus if you and eighty of your closest Jedi friends are flailing away with lightsabers against CGI robots.

Of course, these views can be modified depending how many *types* of unusual power there are. For example, a science-fiction world may view psychic abilities as part of the natural order and embrace them, while viewing magical powers as being entirely unnatural and "wrong," hunting magicians to keep them oppressed.

How are the abilities viewed? A town that fears and hates magic is likely to react poorly to the news that an adventurer is a magician (although they might invite him to an impromptu live-action performance of Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery"). And, obviously, a campaign that reveres psychic powers will probably treat a telepath with awe and reverence . . . and may well try to get him to perform favors.

As a general rule of thumb, the more common an ability is, the more the world will probably have *some* kind of policy or communal attitude (even if it's only a local consensus). This chance increases if the abilities are either visible or dangerous. Beyond that, it's difficult to say *what* that attitude will be, which leaves wide open possibilities for the

How powerful do you like your characters to be in RPGs you play in, compared to the rest of the populace?	
Gods among men! I like really powerful characters. (Four-Colored Supers, High Magic, <i>In Nomine</i>)	2%
Powerful! I like characters with abilities far different from normal people. (<i>Vampire, Mage, Jedi</i>)	8%
<u>Highly competent! I like characters that are still human, but incredibly skilled.</u> (Batman, James Bond, <i>Black Ops</i>)	13%
<u>Competent! I like characters that are human, but still more skilled than normal folks.</u> (<i>X-Files, Dungeons & Dragons, Call of Cthulhu</i>)	33%
<u>Normal! I like my characters human.</u> (some <i>Traveller</i> games)	4%
<u>Men among gods! I like playing weak characters among very strong forces.</u> (<i>Bunnies & Burrows</i>)	0%
It depends. I like playing lots of different power levels.	36%
Dude! I don't roleplay!	0%

direction of the campaign. Do governments try to suppress all beings with these abilities? Do they organize them and grant some special police powers to deal with rogue elements? Does society revere them, allowing them to do what they will? Do these powered individuals, somehow, manage to keep their abilities hidden from the world at large?

What is the mindset of those with the abilities? Most fictional worlds with supernormal abilities go to considerable lengths to establish some kind of communal philosophy, if there are any quantities of those with the power; in fact, there are usually *two* philosophies in opposition to each other. (Jedi opposed to Dark Jedi, Professor X's mutants versus Magneto's, *Vampire's* Camarilla against the Sabbat, and so on.)

For powered PCs this starting philosophy generally becomes the basis for their mindsets. But it doesn't need to be the be-all and end-all; even those who are in heavily regimented groups have their own beliefs, personalities, and variations on the outlook. These variances can provide for rich gaming possibilities. My friend Michael, for example, played a Jedi in one *Star Wars* game. Instead of the typical chivalric code, however, he followed a Victorian one. Thus (for example) he had a strong belief in "fair play," yet he had a racist view that it was humanity's obligation to rule justly over non-human races. He still did *good*, for the most part, but his outlook was so different from the typical Jedi that NPCs (and the other players!) were taken aback. If there *is* a common philosophy among powered people, then merely tweaking a few points of that world view can make an entirely different character.

Where did you get the abilities? Much like skilled heroes, PCs with abilities beyond the norm are often defined by how they got those powers. Sometimes this is extreme; for example, Spider-Man's origin -- where he failed to stop a criminal that would ultimately kill his uncle -- influences his entire philosophy. Although how your character acquired his abilities doesn't need to be quite that effecting, the chances are it probably did have a great influence. Did you undergo rigorous Jedi training? Get killed by a vampire? Did you discover the secret word that caused you to be struck by magical empowering lightning? Were you born with those abilities, or did they manifest with puberty (WHAMMO!)? Careful consideration as to what it means to suddenly (or not-so-suddenly) become different from humanity can go a long way to determine motivations, outlooks, and so on.

What does it mean to have those powers? This one is probably the most important aspect of a powered human game. Consider what it means if you have telepathy. What is the concept of privacy, then? How do you react to non-telepaths? You're in a fight with someone who won't communicate; to you "open" his mind to see what he's thinking?

Consider if you have superspeed. You can accomplish deeds that would take a schmoe on the street many times longer. Cleaning your abode would take an instant . . . to an outside observer. To *you* it would take just as long, unless you were somehow able to "turn off" the increased speed of your conscious mind while activating your superspeed. (And what would that mean?) Consider it further: Endless, pointless lines at the post office or the returns counter of a mall would probably drive you insane. When watching a movie or television you'd be able to speed your perceptions enough that you could *stop* seeing the action; persistence of vision would end, enabling you to see the individual frames or the rapidly moving dot behind the glass. Do you use these abilities constantly, thus widening the divide between you and the rest of the normal-speed world, or do you only tap them when you have to?

What if you had telekinesis? Would you *ever* bend over to pick up an accidentally dropped object, instead of just willing it back in your hand? What would your house look like? "Inaccessible" shelves would no longer have any meaning, for example, and multitasking feats that would be fun with "extra hands" (like during cooking) would look entirely different.

And so on. It's one thing to *say* a character doesn't need to sleep; it's another to follow it through to its conclusion. And, of course, that "conclusion" can be different for each circumstance and character. One sleepless character may devote the time entirely to partying and hedonism, while another who gained his abilities through focus and extensive training may spend that extra time studying, practicing, or meditation. But having an idea of *how* those characters will affect you will go a long way towards fleshing out what he would really be like, and reduce the possibility of unrealistic characters. ("Doug is an insurance agent . . . who just *happens* to be bulletproof.")

With an extra-powered character you get to explore many issues that we, as ordinary schlubs, would never get to experience. Whether this means someone who is just like humanity -- only a bit more "special" -- or someone who is radically different from the mortal experience, you can have a great deal of fun being powered . . . but pimpily.

* * *

I'd also like to take the opportunity to congratulate John Kovalic and his comic [Dork Tower](#) for his Best Professional Gaming Periodical win at the 2001 Origins Awards, handed out last week. Sure, we're a bit biased because John's been a part of the Happy *Pyramid* family for 872 years now, but *Dork Tower* really is one of the best things one can find at your local comic and game shop. We know that you already have a stack of the comics and trade paperbacks on *your* shelves, but why not spread the love and loan 'em to others who may not have been indoctrinated yet?

* * *

Speaking of the Happy Pyramid family, our dear Ken Hite is suffering from the Post-Origins Jet Lag Blues, and thus wasn't able to contribute his usual brilliance to us this week. Hopefully he'll be back with something good and tasty next week.

* * *

Hey, *Pyramid* writers! I'm going through the slushpile now <gasp!> and I'm up to my eyeballs in **GURPS** articles. Now, I love **GURPS** as much as the next Hidden Master-programmed editor, but even I have my limits! If you're looking to stand out currently, why not consider submitting a nice general-audience article, or writing an article for one of the other fine games out there? (And, as ever, we're always looking for good Feature material like Terra Incognita, Warehouse 23, and Appendix Z.)

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Mystery Rummy Case No. 1: Jack The Ripper**, Montague Druitt Suspect card.*

*(One star) "**Why do you wear a mask?***

Shannen 'Shard' Borland: Um, I thought all novas were supposed to. You know, part of the tradition and all that."

The Big Score Bank

by Steven Marsh

When you aren't the biggest bank, or the most prestigious, or the most effective at what you do, how do you survive in the cutthroat world of banking?

You carve a niche, and defend it . . . cutting *others'* throats as necessary.

History

The history of EqTrust is relatively mundane, on the surface. Founded as the Fourth Common Building & Loan in 1869 through misappropriated Reconstruction funds (it apologized in 1969), the institution that would reorganize in the 1980s as "EqTrust" began modestly. Failing to find a common focus throughout the rest of the 19th century that enabled it to grow significantly, the Fourth Common Savings & Loan -- as it was known at the turn of the 20th century -- probably would have disappeared entirely following the stock market crash of 1929s and the Depression of the 1930s, were it not for the foresight of the organization's president at the time: Jacob ("Jake") Thane. Thane was perhaps one of the few people not completely wooed by the euphoric conditions of the 1920s. Thane had been the bank's president since 1911, and recognized that the phenomenal highs of the 1920s stock market were probably a bubble. Unfortunately, he was not strong-willed or convinced enough to short-sell or otherwise find a way to truly make money off the crash phenomenon. This, coupled with his inability to convince his customers and subordinates to show restraint, meant that the institution wasn't much better off in 1929 than most other organizations; thus the FCS&L and its customers were still invested heavily in the stock market and lost millions of dollars. But Thane had a plan.

In the months leading up to the crash, Thane began offering a service to its most trusted and discreet customers. He reasoned that economics is cyclical; *everything* will pass, eventually. As such, what if he could offer a means of keeping funds secure -- really secure -- until whatever the crisis was had passed? What if this money was entirely safe, resistant even to the itchy fingers of panicky investors who may wish to tap the last of their funds?

And thus the 20-year box was devised.

The 20-Year Box

The premise was simple: customers gave Thane whatever valuables they wished him to store, in whatever form they wished him to store it. Thane would then seal it within a *very* secret portion of the bank; the customer would be provided with a key, password, code number, or whatever both parties agreed to; Thane was usually willing to accept whatever means the customer wished; in at least two cases the customer has allowed *any* mechanism; anyone who inquires to the box may open it during the one-month window. The objects in question were then *completely* inaccessible for periods of 20 years. After 20 years, the valuables were available to whoever presented the bank president with the identification means . . . for one month. After that month, the items are then resealed for another 20 years . . . and so on, and so on. During the 20-year periods, no one at the bank will acknowledge the existence of the items (or even the box or vault itself) for that customer. No one besides the bank president even *knows* of their existence, and the president will deny everything. Note that the 20-year periods are different for each box; it is rumored that some clients have staggered boxes over the two decades, so they have access to withdrawing questionable material every few years or so. (The 20-year period of time resulted in the box being referred to independently as a "score box" by a surprising number of customers.)

While this security may seem like overkill -- especially for the expense -- the 20-year boxes provided a number of advantages over traditional safety deposit boxes. First off they are entirely illegal; the complete lack of accounting of any sort would give the state and federal governments conniptions. As such, EqTrust has no qualms about storing *anything* within them; there is, literally, a "no questions asked" policy. They are also remarkably secure; given that

(theoretically) no one outside of the boxes' customers even know of their existence, non-customers don't even know where to look for the items in question. Even if they *did*, they would either need to wait for the one-month window, or attempt a break-in . . . difficult, at best. In point of fact the existence of the boxes *is* known in the underworld; however, the information is very difficult to find. Good contacts might be able to determine that there is such a box system in a bank somewhere, while remarkable contacts might pinpoint a geographic location or even the city EqTrust is in; again, for obvious reasons the existence of the actual bank should be difficult to ascertain, since one of the biggest appeals of the bank's services is that no one knows exactly where it is. The bank also provides extra services regarding its boxes, as well as acquiring clients (see below).

The 20-year boxes have proven popular for a number of clients. Those who steal from corporations, the Mafia, or other dangerous groups have found that the boxes are useful for hiding their ill-gotten goods for 20 years (or 40 . . . or 60 . . .). They are also popular with witnesses or informants to major crimes who want the information to come to light at some time, but not so soon that they are able to be found.

The boxes are not cheap; they usually cost at *least* in the million-dollar range, depending on contents (storing 10 cubic feet of gold is a fair bit trickier than storing the last known photograph of Jimmy Hoffa). This fee is one-time, regardless of elapsed time, until the point when the contents are removed. Then the box is assumed "closed" (although the client can, of course, reopen another box if he wishes). The bank president *can* make exceptions regarding the cost in *very* limited circumstances, usually on the order of "earth-shaking evidence" . . . although in those cases the potential client must share at least enough of the evidence with the bank president to convince him that the bank's services are required (which can, of course, be problematic in itself).

The boxes have proven popular throughout its 80-year history, from people seeking to avoid their money disappearing to the Depression, world wars, and government probes, to those wishing to keep things remarkably hidden and out of sight. The 1960s and early 1970s saw a flurry of activity in the form of what seems to be evidence, perhaps for unsolved crimes or conspiracies. If this information has been retrieved yet, however, the bank president isn't saying. Most recently the last couple of years have seen what seems to be considerable sums of paper wealth -- perhaps stocks -- hidden in the 20-year boxes. What effect, if any, this will have on the world of 2020 remains unknown.

Security

All information regarding the box exists in only one place: the mind of the bank's president. Whenever the bank chooses a successor, the first task of the old president is to make sure the new one memorizes all the transactions and window dates of its clients (numbering in the low hundreds in modern times). The only items memorized are the open window dates and the opening mechanisms (and possibly any special circumstances that surround the box, like the fact it was free). Although each new bank president expresses absolute horror and incredulity that this information is in one place -- "What if you're hit by a car?!?" is usually the first thing exclaimed -- the system has worked so far for almost 100 years. (EqTrust presidents *do* take extraordinary steps to ensure their own longevity, watching their health, buckling their seat belts, and so on.) The current bank president is Marlene Katts, a middle-aged woman with a stern demeanor and an impeccable eye towards business; she still struggles to rescue the "public" face of EqTrust from the machinations of Franklin Plant, the incompetent former president who was one of many caught up in the insanity of the S&L crisis of the 1980s. Katts actually has reservations as to the usefulness of the 20-year-boxes themselves, believing that their once-exorbitant fees are almost not worth it in the information age; it's difficult to have physical objects that are worth enough to make the legal and physical risks worthwhile. But she's already working on a plan to make the boxes more profitable *and* expand its clientele . . .

The 20-year box vaults themselves use whatever is considered "state of the art" for the period, although usually the job is done piecemeal to ensure that no one contractor knows too much about them; the flaws present whenever separate companies work on a project *may* provide a slight opening for would-be intruders. They also enjoy a *very* active protection of the bank's president, who spends a considerable amount of time hunting down any leaked information regarding the boxes existence; in the medium-sized town in which EqTrust is centered, it is perhaps the largest underworld contact. The bank president authorizes any and all means -- up to and including murder -- to take care of problems or keep the specific existence of the EqTrust 20-year box vaults secret. (One president even went so far as to

kill the last contractors who worked on vault revisions in the 1960s . . . although the subsequent police investigations, while ultimately fruitless, were problematic enough that those measures are avoided if possible.) The bank president also uses his extensive information network to recruit new clients; this was more difficult before the information age, when the president needed to rely on corporate and underworld ties to find likely candidates, and then gently and discreetly determine if there was a market for their services (never revealing the physical location of the bank until the deal was all but done, of course).

Beyond that, *anyone* who has the predetermined opening mechanism can access the box during the one-month period it is permitted. If this has caused any problems in the past, the bank president doesn't know (or denies it). The bank president always makes sure that the transferal of items is done in complete anonymity, usually to the extent of closing the bank for an hour for "emergency maintenance work." If desired, those who withdraw from their boxes can do so at night or with other unusual requests; the bank president is more than happy to please its clients.

Campaign Use

The Big Score Bank is perhaps the ultimate bank plot McGuffin; it provides anonymity, underworld contacts, and no-questions-asked access to items of great value. Heroes can discover the existence of someone's opening mechanism and need to track down what it opens. They can use the bank to store items they wish to forget about for a long period of time, but do not wish to -- or cannot -- destroy; occult games may well find EqTrust to be an invaluable resource. They may need to break *into* the bank for some reason, providing a reason to run all those classic "impossible bank heist" plots. And, with the one-month window of opportunity, there is already built-in tension of a time limit; GMs wishing to shorten this can, of course, make the discovery of the opening mechanism happen closer to the end of that window. ("We must get to the city with this one bank in three days!")

The 20-year boxes also provide a more accessible time capsule, of sorts; anything the GM would want to have appear after 20, 40, 60, or 80 years can do so easily. This can be especially useful in games with immortals or long-lived beings, like *Vampire*, *In Nomine*, *Shadowrun* and others.

Adventure Seeds

- An old man claims that he stored invaluable documents (Plans for a water-powered engine? Controlling interest in GloboCo? The Evidence? How to summon The Creature?) in EqTrust's secret vaults in 1942, but now they won't give them to him, despite the fact he *knows* he's arrived on the 60-year anniversary. What's going on, and can the heroes get to the bottom of the mystery without triggering the ire of the bank president and the bank's hit men intent on doing in those who ask too many questions? In fact, the old man *is* telling the truth . . . only he's forgetting the one-month shift. Since the vaults remain closed for 20 full years, then open for a month, after 60 years he needs to wait three months; *then* the box will be accessible. (But, once the truth is figured out, what if the old man dies in those three months? Especially if he hasn't given the opening mechanism?)
- The EqTrust bank president dies unexpectedly (mysteriously?), and the wealthy adventurer finds himself inheriting a bank! (Or perhaps he is appointed its president.) Things go smoothly at first, until strange shifty men show up, wanting to access their boxes. Can the heroes uncover what's going on without angering either the boxes' clients *or* the now-uncontrolled bank's extralegal forces whose last order was, "Eliminate anyone making inquiries into the vaults"?

Designer's Notes: GURPS Mars

by James L. Cambias

Let me begin with a dreadful confession. The whole reason I proposed and wrote *GURPS Mars* was simply to have an excuse for learning a lot about Mars, space travel, terraforming, and pulp science fiction. Happily, Steve Jackson and his loyal minions were kind and gullible enough to let me do it, even going so far as to pay me.

When a book attempts to cover an entire planet, over thousands of years of history plus a couple of alternate universes thrown in for good measure, things get left out. In particular, there was no room for a sample adventure. What follows is an attempt to remedy that lack. It's not quite an out-take, because it was never in to begin with.

The Secret of the Labyrinth: An Adventure for GURPS Mars

This adventure can be used in any of the four *GURPS Mars* campaign settings (with some minor adjustments).

The Mission

The player-characters are explorers venturing into the Noctis Labyrinthus region of Mars. Exactly who they are and why they are going there depends on the setting. On Domed Mars they are astronauts on an early Mars expedition, making the first survey of the area. On Terraformed Mars they are MDF troopers investigating anomalous reports from the orbital sensor web -- possibly signs of Red Mars guerrilla activity. On Superscience Mars the explorers are elite Martian battlesuit troopers sent by the Science Lords on a routine sweep for mutants and outcasts. And on Dying Mars they are a party of Science Priests and companions venturing into the Labyrinthus area in search of ancient artifacts.

The expedition is a small party, consisting only of the heroes and their equipment. A Domed Mars group gets one or two nuclear-powered pressurized rovers, as described in the book. Terraformed Mars characters take a TL9 improved rover, with perhaps an inflatable pressure tent for camping out. The Superscience Mars troopers get a Transport Walker (see the sidebar). Dying Mars characters can travel on riding-lizards, on foot, or by wagon.

Other gear is up to the party. Note that on Domed Mars there are no weapons as such. On Terraformed Mars the team will not be able to get anything heavier than their standard-issue Gyroc carbines. The Superscience troopers have their official Shock Trooper battlesuits, ray-pistols (electrolasers) and portable heat-beams (military laser rifles). Dying Mars Science Priests and their entourage have whatever weapons they wish -- the Labyrinth is known to be a haunt of bandits.

Superscience Martian Transport Walker

This is a low, six-legged vehicle used for transport on the Martian surface. It could also be used as a scout vehicle and armored personnel carrier in an invasion of Earth. Because of its six legs, the transport walker is fairly easy to drive, even for Earthlings unfamiliar with walking machinery.

Subassemblies: Body +3, 6 Legs [U:Body] +2.

Powertrain: 200-kW RTG with 150-kW leg drivetrain.

Fuel: --

Occupancy: 2 NCS, 6 NS. *Cargo:* 3cf, 150 lbs.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
<i>Body:</i>	4/20	4/20	4/20	4/20	4/20
<i>Legs:</i>	3/10	3/10	3/10	3/10	3/10

Weaponry

None.

Equipment

Body: 1,000-mile radio, Low-light TV (+3), GPS, Winch (ST 50), TL9 radiation shielding, 16 Martian-days limited life support.

Statistics

Size: 6' × 10' *Payload:* 1,750 lbs. *Lwt.:* 4.5 tons (Earth), 1.75 tons (Mars).

Volume: 420 cf. *Maint.:* 59 hours. *Price:*

The Labyrinth

Noctis Labyrinthus is a weird and dangerous region on any version of Mars. Long ago some titanic force pushed up the crust here, cracking and splitting the surface into a network of chasms and rifts. Heat (presumably from the magma plume below) melted some of the ice in the crust, and flowing water excavated the fault lines and drained off into Marineris Valles.

The result is an area the size of Montana, consisting of isolated plateaux and mesas, crisscrossed by canyons. The canyons are as much as 3 miles wide and sometimes more than a mile deep. Melting water has also formed caves beneath the plateaux, opening into the canyons.

In three versions of Mars from *GURPS Mars*, the Labyrinth is almost uninhabitable. Its great altitude (4 miles above mean datum) makes the air too thin to breathe even in the later stages of terraforming. The Martians of Superscience Mars and the humans of Terraformed Mars can survive the Labyrinth with respirator masks, as described in *GURPS Space* and *Ultra-Tech*.

On Dying Mars the air of the Labyrinth is thin, but breathable. Martians of that world need only make a HT roll when attempting something strenuous (like hand-to-hand fighting, for example). A failed HT roll costs 1 point of Fatigue.

Naturally, humans on Domed Mars need Mars suits to survive outdoors in the Labyrinth, just as they do elsewhere on the planet. There is an increased radiation risk due to lack of protecting atmosphere.

The confusing multitude of branching chasms and valleys in the Labyrinth make navigation difficult, even with accurate maps. Navigation skill is at a -3 penalty, -1 if the travelers have a GPS or other high-tech navigation aid.

The broken terrain of the Labyrinth also makes it a good place for ambushes and surprise attacks. In almost any setting the hostile conditions and good concealment make the Labyrinth a natural refuge for rebels and bandits.

The Monster of the Labyrinth

The Labyrinth is a mysterious, timeless place. Even in the Terraformed Mars setting, it is barely affected by the planet's transformation. Gamemasters can use it as the Martian "Bermuda Triangle" -- a place where reality is thin, and things can fall into different worlds.

The Monster of the Labyrinth is one such interloper -- or perhaps the heroes have blundered into another world themselves. On the three high-tech versions the first sign of something strange is that the air outside is thicker and contains more oxygen. Dying Martians will notice that there are no plants visible and the temperature has gotten very chilly. Then the Monster appears.

In Domed Mars the Monster is a Dying Martian nomad war-band, riding lizards and armed with spears and a few muskets. The warriors have seen (or heard of) motor vehicles, so they won't be awestruck or fearful of the crawlers. They will attack aggressively, leaping from their lizards onto the moving crawlers and trying to break in.

\$145,000.

HT: 12.

HP: 450 Legs: 75 each.

gSpeed: 65 gAccel: 20 gDecel: 20 gMR:
0.75 gSR: 4

Extremely Low GP; off-road speed 65 mph.

Explorer Robot

This is a TL8 robot used for surface exploration by Mars expeditions. It can operate on its own for long periods, navigating across the surface with the help of satellite locators and an internal map of the planet. Its neural-net computer lets it learn from experience and adapt to unusual situations. A human controller can remote-operate it in realtime, or simply assign it tasks. The robot is not armed, but it can make melee attacks with its sampler arm, which has a sharp shovel blade.

The robot has ST 8/20, DX 10, IQ 8, HT 11. Its Move is 7.

It has night vision, imaging Ladar, an inertial compass, a radiation detector, a chemscanner (touch only), and a single arm capable of doing 1d+3 cutting damage in melee. The robot is radiation hardened (PF 10) and is covered with armor (PD 3, DR 10).

The robot has only one eye, no sense of hearing or

In Terraformed Mars the menace is a war tripod from Superscience Mars. Its pilot will attack aliens on sight, going after their vehicle first and then trying to mop up stragglers.

In Superscience Mars the enemy is a party of Red Mars guerrillas armed with stolen TL9 military hardware from the Mars Defense Force. The Red Mars people have Gyroc carbines (see *GURPS Ultra-Tech*), with both SLAP and APEX ammunition, and a dozen carefully-hoarded Viper rounds with smart guidance. They also have two 120-mm single-shot rocket launchers (see *Ultra-Tech 2*). The Reds are wearing civilian skinsuits (PD 0, DR 1) with respirator masks; two of them have TL9 ablative torso armor to wear over their suits (PD 4, DR 24 vs. energy weapons, PD 1, DR 4 against projectiles). They will initially be curious about this strange vehicle and its stranger crew, but if hostilities begin the Reds will fight very intelligently, using cover, trying to take out the vehicle with their heavy weapons, and then picking off the infantry one by one.

In Dying Mars the foe is a NASA robot probe, cut off from outside control and unable to recognize the heroes as intelligent beings. See the sidebar for stats. The robot can tell that the Martians are living creatures because they move and are warmer than the surrounding environment. Its designers did program it to recognize humans, but nobody expected it to meet intelligent Martians. Upon detecting life it will immediately try to get samples and stuff them into its storage space.

Ariadne

After the initial combat, the party meets another explorer, from a different world, who has found the source of the problem but can't solve it alone. The other is from a different world again. If the party are Domed Mars explorers, they encounter Nelidor, one of the Science Lords of Superscience Mars, out investigating unusual phenomena. If they are from Terraformed Mars, they meet Sistreen, a Science Priest from Dying Mars. Superscience Martians meet Dana Barry, a NASA scientist from Domed Mars. Dying Martians encounter Robin Kim, a Carter-series genemod field ecologist from Terraformed Mars. In each case, the new arrival is not armed, and is considerably shaken up by an encounter with hostiles. Their motives are different, however: Nelidor will try to turn any situation to his advantage, Sistreen is obsessed with recovering valuable technology, Ms. Barry is helpful and curious about everything, and Ms. Kim suspects the whole thing may be some sort of weird media stunt.

Each of the researchers has made the same discovery. The center of all the weird happenings in Noctis Labyrinthus is right at the highest altitude point, at longitude 102 by latitude -7. As the party travels to the site they encounter traces of other travelers from a variety of alternate versions of Mars -- steampunk Victorian Mars explorers, 1950s Von

smell, and only one arm with Bad Grip. It is mute. Total weight is 200 lbs (Earth) or 76 lbs (Mars); size is 3.8 cubic feet.

Brain: TL8 standard, compact, genius, hardened, neural net (60 lbs, 1.2 cf, \$300,000, Complexity 4, IQ 8); 70 points.

Sensors: basic TL8 package with Night Vision, one eye, deafness, no sense of smell/taste, imaging LADAR, radiation detector, and chemscanner (5 lbs., 0.1cf, \$7,700); 25 points.

Communicators: basic TL8 package with Mute, long-range radio, and lasercom (19.2 lbs, 0.4 cf, \$5,700); 7 points.

Arm Motors: one ST 20 extendible arm with Bad Grip (8 lbs., 0.16cf, \$8000); -15 points.

Propulsion: 200-watt wheeled drivetrain (1.5 lbs, 0.03cf, \$30).

Weapons: Sharp Claw shovel blade (\$200).

Navigation Systems: Inertial compass (1 lb., 0.02cf, \$250); 5 points.

Cargo Space: 1 cubic foot.

Power: 10 square feet of solar cells generating 0.2 kW on Mars (1 lb., \$300); rechargeable C cell storing 1800 kws (1 lb., 0.01cf, \$100). 10 points.

Subassemblies: Solar Panel 10 sf; Arm 0.2 cf, 2.5 sf; Wheels 0.6 cf (0.1cf each), 1.5 sf each; Body 3cf, 13 sf.

Structure: Solar panel is expensive extra-light (7.5 lbs., \$500), Arm is expensive light (3.75 lbs., \$250), body is expensive light (19.5 lbs., \$1300), wheels are expensive medium (27 lbs., \$1800). Total: 51 lbs.

Hit Points: Solar panel 4, Arm 4, Body 10, Wheels 4 each.

Surface Features: body has DR 10 ablative (3.9 lbs., \$31); arm has DR5 ablative (0.375 lbs, \$3), wheels have DR10 nonrigid (3.6 lbs., \$360). Body and arm are sealed (\$620). Body has radiation shielding (26 lbs., \$260). 64 points.

Design Weight: 185 lbs., .0925 tons on Earth; 71 lbs, .0352 tons on Mars. Loaded weight 200/0.1 on Earth, 76/.038 on Mars.

Total volume: 3.8 cf.

Price: \$327,404

ST: 8/20 [45 points] *DX* 10 *IQ* 8 [-15] *HT* 11 [5]

Ground Speed: 11 (7 off-road).

Braun expedition astronauts, a Rust China military squad from *Transhuman Space*, or whatever other worlds the GM prefers.

At the center of the weird phenomena there is a strange five-sided pyramid of crystal, about ten meters tall. The sinister tentacled Martians glimpsed in visions by H.G. Wells and others are conducting a magical ritual there, trying to restore life to their own Mars by draining it from dozens of parallel worlds. The PCs can actually see and feel the life energy (mana, orgone, whatever) being sucked toward the pyramid.

There are twice as many tentacled Martians as player characters; fortunately they have no Heat-Rays or war machines handy, but their own vitality has been boosted by the pyramid. They will try to take the PCs alive if possible (no sense wasting all that nice fresh blood), but will kill to protect the pyramid.

The pyramid is fragile. Any single attack doing more than 10 points of damage will crack it, releasing the stolen energy in a dazzling flash. Without the pyramid as a focus for the magic, the connection among the worlds collapses, catapulting everyone back to their proper settings.

Villainous Tentacled Martians

The Tentacled Martians are horrid creatures, the end product of a million years of evolution and genetic engineering aimed at creating pure intellects. They are big boneless leathery creatures, roughly the size of a bear, with two bunches of tentacles, huge staring eyes, and a slack lipless mouth. On Mars they can get around fairly well walking on their tentacle bunches, but are helpless on worlds with higher gravity (the statistics here are for their native environment).

Tentacled Martians have ST 6 [-30], DX 8/12 [-20], IQ 14 [45], HT 10, and Move 4. They have the racial advantages Acute Hearing +2 [4], Extra Arms (6) [60], Manual Dexterity (+4) [12], Night Vision [10], Telepathy-3 [15], and Thick Hide (PD1, DR1) [28]. Their racial disadvantages are Callous [-6], Dying Race [-10], Odious Personal Habit (preys on humans) [-20], and Weak Immune System [-30]. Skills for this party include Brawling-8, Knife-12, Mental Blow-12, Mind Shield-14, Stealth-10, Telereceive-14, Telesend-14, Weird Science-14, and Weird Magic-14.

These Martians don't have any of their super-scientific weapons, but they are equipped with scalpel-sharp knives doing 1d-3 impaling damage, and their own psionic powers.

The Ephemeral Suit

by Jon Mollison

The classic mad scientist is a staple of many genres; pulp adventures, 1950's style horror movies, comic book villains, tales of secret agents, and modern day conspiracy. One thing that every mad scientist needs is a closet full of jaw-dropping inventions that defy the laws of physics. The Ephemeral Suit is one such invention for any era, from the Victorian Steampunk to near future.

What It Is

Atoms consist of tiny subatomic particles which are separated by relatively large regions of empty space. The Ephemeral Suit takes advantage of this fact by allowing its wearer to pass through solid objects.

How It Works

The Ephemeral Suit generates ultra-subatomic particles and accelerates them through bands of a special tungsten-carbide alloy. As they stream through the bands of metal, the quasitrons generate an Ephemeral Field which massages the temporal-spatial oscillations of subatomic particles within the field to counterpoint the temporal-spatial oscillations of subatomic particles outside the field. While activated, the wearer can pass through solid objects without a trace.

One curious aspect of this process is that the field only operates in a direction roughly perpendicular to gravity fields. As a result the wearer can only pass through objects horizontally -- never vertically. While this means that the suit cannot pass through floors or ceilings, it also allows the wearer to climb stairs and ladders. More importantly, it means that the suit won't plummet to the center of the earth every time it is turned on.

When activated, the wearer of the suit will feel resistance as he passes through solid objects -- much like walking through water (without the buoyancy). The density of the object dictates how much resistance will be felt. Lead, for example, exerts much more resistance than wood or flesh. Objects which are passed through will show no physical change from the process, but people will feel light pressure, like a mild breeze, which passes with no harmful effect.

What it Looks Like

The suit is a bulky white rubber suit with a great hump on its back, a closed hood, and a zipper running from the crotch to the neck. The suit's hump contains the quasitron generator and power supply, which is connected to many flexible bands of the tungsten-carbide sandwiched between two thick layers of rubber. Once the zipper is entirely closed the wearer can activate the suit, but will not be able to see. When activated the suit is not invisible and the process gives off a soft, high pitched whine.

The quasitron generator is also connected to a small metal control box that is buckled around the wearer's waist, inside the suit. This control box has a simple on/off toggle. Though the suit can be turned on through the bulky rubber, it is only possible to turn the field off by sliding one arm out of the suit's sleeve and reaching inside the suit to turn the power off.

Wearing the Suit

When the suit is activated, the wearer is immune to most physical damage -- bullets, shrapnel, even speeding trains will pass right through him. The wearer is not immune to all damage, however. Because the suit only operates horizontally, it is possible to damage the wearer vertically (i.e. slashing downward with a sword or club, tossing him

from a plane, or dropping a piano on his head.)

Shutting off power to the suit while inside a solid object is not recommended. If this should happen the suit will be ruined; the metal bands and quasitron generator act in concert to generate the Ephemeral Field. Should the wearer's head or torso become fused with a solid object, death will be swift and painful. Specific damage done to the wearer if his limbs are fused should be determined by the GM and depend on the rule system being used. The only way to free someone who has his limbs fused to a solid object is amputation.

It takes at least 30 seconds to squirm out of the suit, and twice as long to put it on.

Though the Ephemeral Suit is a powerful device, anyone who uses the suit is going to face a few obstacles:

While zipped up (and turned on) the wearer cannot see anything. The only way the wearer knows it is safe to turn off the suit is that he feels no resistance to movement. Without a good sense of direction the wearer could easily wind up materializing in the wrong place -- even stuck in a wall.

Only objects that will fit in a pocket can be carried inside the suit; though knives, pistols, and cameras are allowed, there simply isn't room for large doomsday devices, vehicles, or friends.

In order to affect anything, the suit must be turned off sometime. Since the suit's gloves are thick and bulky, the wearer will need to wriggle out of it before doing anything that requires manual dexterity, like fire a pistol, take a picture or crack a safe.

The suit is always visible and is not silent. Should the suit be used in the presence of witnesses, they will be able to describe a large, humped biped that phased through a solid wall. In a quiet location the witness may have heard a soft, high pitched hum. Depending on their prejudices, they may describe the suit and its wearer as a ghost, hallucination, or hologram.

Adventure Seeds

- Not every mad scientist is a financial wizard; this device is the perfect way to obtain funding for the development of more incredible toys. In any era, investigators can be called in to assist the police in solving a string of mysterious bank robberies.
- In super-hero campaigns a malfunctioning suit might be responsible for the origins of a super hero or villain. Should two individuals become fused it might create a single person with twice the smarts or strength of either of them alone -- but also cause schizophrenia.
- . . . or a scientist might become fused with his super-computer, thereby transferring his intellect into its mainframe.
- A world-renowned cat burglar has been using the suit to steal all of the largest single diamonds in the world and the heroes have been called in to help guard the famed White Lightning Diamond, which is in town as part of a traveling history exhibit.
- The character's powerful patron needs his protection from a high profile assassin or spy who has been able to bypass the tightest security.
- A group of nosy investigators opens the right closet in Warehouse 23 and wastes time trying to figure out what the bulky suit is and how it works.

Pyramid Review

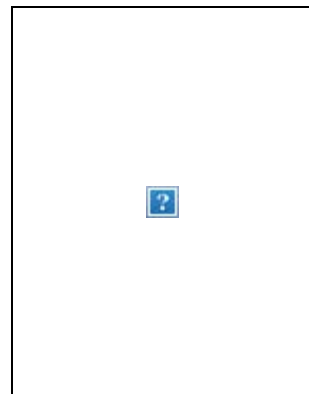
Mean Streets RPG

Published by [Deep7](#)

Written and produced by **Mark Bruno**

56-page PDF; \$7.95

(Available via [Deep7's website](#) and [RPGnow.com](#))



Since *Mean Streets: The RPG of Classic Film Noir* isn't following hot on the heels of Archon Gaming, Inc.'s *Noir*, the last high-profile effort in the genre, it's probably safe to say dark cinema is not the most faddish campaign arena in the market. Nevertheless, Deep7 takes a shot at bringing the dank and ill-lit streets of the hard-boiled private detective story to the tabletop with this first release in the XPG System.

The year is 1943 (by default, anyway), and the embattled mayor of New York City is fighting an intense battle against the united criminal forces of the Syndicate. It's much like the New York we know, but with a few details changed and some fudging on the history to give it the cinematic veneer. Players play cops, politicians, gangsters, mob molls, and private investigators caught up in webs of intrigue or running from their own past. Most of the story is open-ended, leaving it up to the GM and his players to choose the focus of their game.

Fledgling PCs start with a character archetype and six statistics. The archetypes are critical only for determining starting wealth, but for some reason they are discussed at the end of the character creation section. The stats are Agility (control of the whole body for activities like gymnastics or brawling), Dexterity (fine motor control and eye-hand coordination), Perception (your ability to interact with the world around you), Strength (your physical power), Intelligence (how smart you are and how quickly you learn), and Willpower (without which you can't be the hard-boiled type when the police interrogate you for information). You place 1 to 6 points into each from an initial pool of 20.

From those six stats you get your derived stats: Initiative (the total of Perception and Agility, used to determine your reaction time); Save (the sum of Strength and Willpower, used to stay conscious when you've been wounded); and Shrug (the average of Strength and Willpower, used to resist getting wounded).

You are given 30 points with which to buy skills. You can put up to 4 points in any skill, and you may specialize (some skills require that you do so). When you specialize, the area of expertise you choose gets a +1 bonus, while anything that falls outside that knowledge receives a -1 penalty. As a lock picker, then, you may be very good with safes, but any other lock will give you a penalty.

Each skill falls under a closely related statistic, and the two are added together to get the Target Number for a successful use of the skill. Gambling is a Perception skill, so if you have a Perception of 3 and a Gambling skill of 1, your TN will be 4. Roll equal to or less than this on two six-sided dice and you succeed. A two is a critical success and a 12 is a critical failure, regardless of what the TN is. For a critical success, this means you get to roll the skill again and add the margins by which you made the two rolls (assuming both rolls work out and you don't make them exactly). You can use skills unskilled; you'll just have a 0 as far as the skill rating is concerned and end up relying on your base statistics (which makes that career in medicine look much more promising). You can prepare for skill use, which gives a +1 to +3 bonus depending on how long you take to ready yourself.

The character is rounded out by Personality Traits: Assets, Liabilities, and Behavior Tags. These are purchased with the same points as skills. Assets are beneficial traits, like Direction Sense or more Wealth than the average starting

character; since they give an advantage they cost points. Liabilities are drawbacks; they limit you by giving you something to contend with like a Hidden Past or an Enemy, but then you'll have more points to spend on skills or Assets. Behavior Tags are like minor Liabilities; they add role-playing flavor to your character with little identifying qualities like a Nervous Tic. Each of these is worth another point that can be spent elsewhere.

Figure out your starting wealth, which varies according to the profession you select (and any Assets or Liabilities you took), and then give yourself a Destiny Point. The Destiny Point can be spent to re-roll an unfavorable result once in a game, but then you're stuck with the new result. A little character history and you're ready to hit the hot and steamy streets.

Once on those streets, most people are going to want to slap you around with a sap -- it is film noir, after all. If you want to fire a gun or hit someone with brass knuckles, roll against Dexterity + Firearms, Agility + Melee, or whatever combination is appropriate, like most other skill uses. Your opponent can try to dodge it with an Agility + Dodge roll (or one of many similar arrangements), though this costs an action and makes subsequent actions harder, or parry an attack, which isn't likely with a bullet but it's a free action.

If you hit the target, you subtract their skill margin from the margin you rolled and multiply that by the Weapon Rating. Melee attacks get to add the attacker's Strength to this total and Ranged attacks get to add the weapon's Damage Bonus. Apply the result to the target's Shrug. If their Shrug is higher, they're at -1 for their next action. If it's lower, the target takes a wound. If the damage is more than twice the Shrug, they take 2 wounds, and so on. Wounds take you through seven levels, from Scathed to Dead. Each level of damage has a negative modifier to further actions and determines what it will take for the character to recover. There's a small section on vehicle combat, too, which uses Speed, Maneuverability, and Chassis in place of the usual character combat stats.

There is some discussion of the Second World War, some background on the faux New York the game uses, plus a briefing on art, music, literature, events, and other details of the period the GM can use as a primer. There is also a selection of NPCs, an equipment list, a bibliography and filmography, and an adventure in which a cop's suicide seems to involve several different factions on both sides of the law. There's a gamemaster's guide, but it reads more like a movie guide and can be indistinguishable from the filmography.

The book suffers from several problems. The writing is sloppy and the editing does little to change that. The text is full of clichés, repeated phrasing, and generalizations, and some parts just throw you (Assets, for example, are listed with a negative cost because you subtract them from the points you have to spend). The bibliographical references aren't bad, but they sound like they were written by someone else -- in some cases they were, with synopses and descriptions quoted from the Internet Movie Database and other sources. The GMing section depends heavily in many spots on the reader having read or seen the books or movies in question; outside the sample adventure, solid tips on creating stories and developing the campaign are fairly scarce.

Some of the artwork is nice, and there are several striking photos throughout the book, including a vivid and eye-catching cover. The combat mechanics are generous -- you can use just about any active skill, from gymnastics to jumping, to dodge an attack -- and the die roll mechanic for critical success is a sly way of keeping just any old blind success from being a mind-boggling feat of heroism. The section on old New York is a good mix of real history and gameable storytelling, and it's a shame it isn't longer because not only is it clearly the part the author excels at, it would increase the book's general utility for developing the setting. The document's interface is also easy to work with.

Since the book comes as a .pdf, it should be easier to make corrections (and hopefully offer them to the buyer), something the current manuscript desperately needs. It's fairly inexpensive in this form, but it's a dangerous trade-off between quality and cost. At best, *Mean Streets* is a rough-hewn tool with limited uses; without more work on the part of either the production team or the GM who purchases it, the game's future could be as dark as its subject matter.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

World of Darkness: Mafia

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

Written by Ari Marmell, Matthew McFarland, C.A. Suleiman, and Ed Hall

Illustrated by Mike Danza, Andy Trabbold, Kirk Van Wormer, and Kieran Yanner

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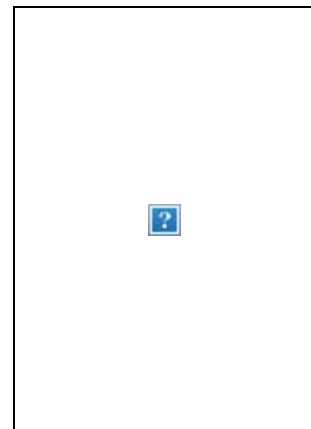
For the World of Darkness, 2002 is the "Year of the Damned," in which the lengths to which its inhabitants are prepared to go in fulfilling their lofty ideals -- or darkest cravings -- are explored. It asks if the ends justify the means and what true price is there to be paid for the acquisition of power. This theme will run across supplements for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, *Kindred of the East*, *Hunter: The Reckoning*, *Vampire: Dark Ages*, and *Vampire: The Masquerade*, before culminating in the next RPG for the World of Darkness, *Demon: The Fallen*.

The first release in the series is *World of Darkness: Mafia*, which examines the place of the "men of respect" alongside, as well as within, the supernatural that is the World of Darkness. There has always been a certain fascination with the Mafia, mostly fueled by the romantic vision we see on screen in such Hollywood films as *The Godfather* (and its sequels), *Goodfellas*, plus more recently in the award-winning television series *The Sopranos*. This has led to supplements for RPGs such as *Shadowrun* and *Cyberpunk 2020*, and even a complete RPG in the form of the excellent *Ghost Dog: the Way of the Samurai*. Across the various World of Darkness core games, there have been plenty of suggestions as which of the many, many factions have some kind of criminal involvement. These include the *Giovanni*, the *Glass Walkers*, and the *Virtual Adepts*, but *World of Darkness: Mafia* is not a supplement for any one core Storyteller RPG, instead covering the World of Darkness in general.

World of Darkness: Mafia is a decently produced supplement, very much laid out in the White Wolf house style. That means that various different typefaces are used to differentiate between voices, some of which are done as letters and journals, although in places the choice of font is less than easy upon the eye. Fortunately this book is without a single reference to the dreaded "pXX," but it should have received a final read through before going to print, to catch the misuse of a font or the substitution of a slightly wrong word, such as "him" instead of "hit." Overall, the interior illustration is fairly good, with the work of Andy Trabbold really standing out.

The slant that the authors take upon the Mafia is that they are *not* an organization on the decline in the face of heavy competition from other gangs and constant scrutiny from the legal authorities. Of course, the Mafia must still contend with both of these forms of competition in the World of Darkness, but the Mafia retains the power, influence, and style of that found in their Hollywood portrayal. This romanticized vision still leaves plenty for the roleplayer to sink their teeth into; just as with the other Storyteller games, Mafioso adhere to a strong sense of tradition, abide by their own set of ethics, and are forced to operate outside of normal society because of both this and the sometimes horrific and dehumanizing orders they can be forced to carry out to prove their loyalty.

The history of the Mob begins with their possible origins on Sicily in the thirteenth century, before concentrating mainly upon their heavy presence and involvement in the New World in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth. This is explained in a series of letters from a mage, Jerry Giamatta, who is persuaded by his correspondent to locate and do a hit on one Dominic Cardona, Jr., who just happened to occupy a cell next door to Al Capone before



Scarface was shipped to Alcatraz and is still around in the twenty-first century.

Their current status and operations are explained using a similar device: a report of a Childe to his sire, Don Antonio Cardona, a kindred that has recently awakened from seventy years of slumber. Unfortunately, only the voice of the Childe was caught on tape, so the reader must guess at the nature of Cardona's questions from the answers in the transcript. One disconcerting way in which this chapter is laid out is its use of the ends or beginnings of sentences as subsection titles to indicate a change in subject. This serves to break up the text in a very irritating fashion, as the reader is forced to read these as both titles and body text.

In general, the information in this chapter and the previous one is quite generic, meaning that it could serve as a useful source for any game if necessary; it is in the report to Don Antonio that we begin to get hints at the relationship between the Mafia and the various factions of the supernatural world. Although *World of Darkness: Mafia* is meant to cover the World of Darkness as a whole, it is the kindred that receive the bulk of this supplement's attention. Of the many vampire clans, it is the Ventrue that have had and maintain the closest of ties to organized crime, though the Lasombra, Brujah, and Nosferatu all have a strong presence. Surprisingly, the Giovanni have few ties to the Sicilian Mob, preferring to compete against them with their own families. Other clans only associate with the Mafia, as do some warlocks (Mages) and werewolves. More interesting is the situation of the Restless Dead, with untold numbers remaining to haunt the Italian neighborhoods that have been the scene of countless acts of bloodshed. They could be innocent victims caught in the crossfire or intended victims, including Mafioso, who might still want their revenge or even be prepared to break their "Omerta" (or "code of silence") in their afterlife!

The rules for character creation concentrate upon the design of mortal Mafioso, usually of low standing within the Mob. It should be noted that this is all the characters will remain if they are either female or of non-Italian blood. If male, and of Italian blood, they may be able to advance from associate to soldier and possibly as high as "Made Man" or even Don of a family. As they do so, they will need to protect their position . . . not just from those hungry for it from below, but also from above if they get too ambitious or the Don thinks them a threat. The process of character generation is standard to any of the Storyteller games, and a cheat sheet is provided to speed the process up; however, an actual set of rules from another World of Darkness game will still be needed to run a *Mafia* chronicle. Also included are new Backgrounds, Family Status and Favors Owed, as well as new Merits and Flaws: Stand-Up Guy, Snitch, Made Man, Jaded, and On the Lam. Of the Backgrounds that already exist in the World of Darkness, both Contacts and Allies are very appropriate to Mafioso characters. The storyteller will need to let their players know which other backgrounds, merits, and flaws are also suitable.

Just as Virtues represent a vampire's moral struggle, they do the same job for members of the Mob. Even though they are necessary or done at the order of their Don, committing atrocities risks losing a character's humanity. If they have qualms or are remorseful about their deeds, then their Humanity remains intact, whereas if carried out with callous disregard, it may be on the wane. The guidelines included will help the Storyteller handle the loss of Humanity in a *Mafia* chronicle. Given the violent and bloody nature of Mafia life, the potential for loss is quite high, so the Storyteller will also need to be judicious in applying such losses to the characters.

The chapter on storytelling covers just about every method of running a Mafia chronicle, starting from the top and working down. They start with the players as family Dons or Made Men competing against each other or other organized gangs; then look at running just a single crew; and having them play from the bottom up as associates or button men, progressing to soldiers and Made Men through the course of a campaign. Alternatively they could be law enforcement investigating organized crime, or even the ordinary businessmen or shopkeepers defending their neighborhood against Mob extortion. This is before supernatural possibilities are even introduced, which could lead to chronicles of Mafioso versus one such element or whole crews made up of one faction or another. It is suggested that such crews do not consist of different supernatural creatures, as this more akin to a superhero game than one of supernatural and personal horror. If there is a favored chronicle inherent to *World of Darkness: Mafia*, it is one that has the characters as low grade associates, working their way up and slowly becoming aware of somebody pulling the strings from the shadows as the Storyteller slowly introduces the supernatural to their chronicle. Eventually the characters might progress to the point where they really do get embraced as "Made Men"! This could be more interesting if played out in the locale of a supernatural chronicle already created through years of play.

Whatever the choice of chronicle, a *Mafia* campaign should turn out to be one of blood and violence, given the nature of the Mob and their traditions. In between the outbursts of murder and intimidation, there is still scope for politics and business.

As good as the advice on storytelling and the background of the Mafia is in *World of Darkness: Mafia*, it is the storyteller who will have to decided upon the exact nature and the extent of the links between the La Cosa Nostra and the supernatural within his own game; there is nothing really either definitive or specific about the Mafia and the World of Darkness in this supplement. This is intentional upon the part of the authors, as they do not want to upset the apple cart of any one storyteller's campaign, nor do they introduce any major metaplot that could do the same. This is perhaps both a strength and a weakness -- the former because it leaves the storyteller free to use the Mafia as they want and not as White Wolf dictates, thus causing arguments over what is and is not canon. It is a weakness because it leaves the reader with the feeling that there is a lot more that they are not being told about the relationship between organized crime and the World of Darkness. The nearest we get to this is the last journal of Dominic Cardona, Jr. who just happens to have died recently at the hands of our aforementioned Mage. As a wraith, he follows his killer through the noted Mafia cities of North America and back to Malta, where Don Antonio has been controlling a family for centuries. It would have been interesting to see this background at least expanded upon; but, much like the rest of this book, it is not.

Also lacking from *World of Darkness: Mafia* is a bibliography. Mentions are made of *The Godfather Trilogy*, *The Sopranos*, and *Donnie Brasco*, but only within the text, and not on a single easy-to-flip-to page. Further considering the emphasis of the connections between the Mafia and the kindred, it is surprising that the film *Innocent Blood* does not get at least a mention, since it involves both the Mafia and vampires. Any storytellers wanting to learn more about the Mob will not only have to conduct their own research, but also start literally from scratch.

World of Darkness: Mafia is strong on theme and provides more than enough information about the Mafia for the storyteller to construct and run a chronicle of their own. It still requires a copy of the full Storyteller rules to play, when it could have just as easily stood alone from such supernatural elements. Ultimately, this is where it disappoints, because any such full game will concentrate upon the supernatural, and *World of Darkness: Mafia* only hints at their involvement with the Mob. For the storyteller who wants to add organized crime to their game, *World of Darkness: Mafia* is worth looking at as a source of ideas.

--Matthew Pook

Know When To Say Wendigo

*"The Wendigo,
The Wendigo!
Its eyes are ice and indigo!
Its blood is rank and yellowish!
Its voice is hoarse and bellowish!
Its tentacles are slithery,
And scummy,
Slimy,
Leathery!"*
-- Ogden Nash, "The Wendigo"

Bisociatively speaking, the wendigo is a monster and its victim, an ogre and an elemental, real enough to kill for and created by ignorance and accident. The wendigo comes from inside and from Outside -- made stronger by famine, its hunger is insatiable. Like all good myths and evil monsters, the wendigo appears where you most expect him -- but his howl echoes off some odd corners, indeed. The wendigo, like revenge, is a dish best served cold. So come and get it.

"Out there, in the heart of unreclaimed wilderness, they had surely witnessed something crudely and essentially primitive. Something that had survived somehow the advance of humanity had emerged terrifically, betraying a scale of life still monstrous and immature. He envisaged it rather as a glimpse into prehistoric ages, when superstitions, gigantic and uncouth, still oppressed the hearts of men; when the forces of nature were still untamed, the Powers that may have haunted a primeval universe not yet withdrawn."
-- Algernon Blackwood, "The Wendigo"

Out there, in the cold north woods, something lurks. In some forms, it is a classic ogre: hairy and foul-smelling, with burning red eyes and a ferocious hunger for human flesh. In other forms, it takes on more fantastic lines: it has a heart made of ice, or even an entire icy skeleton; its feet are webbed, or possess one mighty talon. It rises high above the trees; perhaps it is as tall as them, or even taller. Does it fly, with the Arctic wind, uprooting trees with its passage, or does it leave its curiously-misshapen footprints scattered across the snow in gigantic leaps? It catches hunters out too long, or women left homeless by raids or warfare. Some people it simply takes, never to be seen again; some people it drops as from a great height; others it returns to their village weeks or even years later, shaken by their unholy abduction. Some people, however, it attacks even more subtly and horribly -- it possesses them, driving them to kill and eat their fellow men. Such possessed cannibals can be told by their rejection of normal food, their glowing red eyes, and (occasionally) their malformed feet. Those who have eaten human flesh open themselves to such possession, and must be killed or shunned. Although some medicine men can heal wendigo possession by pouring boiling fat down the throat of the victim and melting his icy heart, it is a chancy thing.

This outline encompasses the majority of the tales of the wendigo, also called the windigo, witiko, wheetigo, whitego, wihtikow, windego, kokodjo, and so forth. (The plural is "wendigowak," but since traditionally, two wendigowak fight each other to the death upon meeting, it doesn't get used much.) The name is probably Cree, and likely derives from *wi'tgo'ku*, meaning "crazy" or "insane," although it might also come from Assiniboin words meaning "he who lives alone." The first recorded wendigo tales surface among the Algonquin Cree and Ojibway (Chippewa) in the early 18th century, written down by trappers with the Hudson's Bay Company. The wendigo has "cousins" in the Wechuge of the Beaver Indians, the Kwakiutl Man-Eater, the Atcen of the Montagnais, the Micmac Cheenoo, and various "Cannibal Spirits" of the Assiniboin and other Sioux, whose cult leaders often use variants of the wendigo name. (The Lakota leader Crazy Horse, for example, was Tashunka Witko -- "Wendigo Horse." Hmmm.) During the 19th century, as Europeans expanded into the northern forests, wendigo encounters went up; the canonical list gives over 70 cases from roughly 1775 to 1903. Even further into the twentieth century, both Roseau, Minnesota and Kenora, Ontario have reported wendigo hauntings (and, interestingly enough, UFO sightings in the early 1950s), often associated with murders or mysterious disappearances.

"A Northeastern Indian, convinced that he has become or is becoming windigo, inevitably turns to cannibalism as the appropriate behavior, an appropriateness determined by the cultural belief system. Regardless of the ailment he may actually have, once the common diagnosis of windigo has been applied, his future path of action is clearly demarcated by the culture; there is no alternative path."

-- Morton I. Teicher, *Windigo Psychosis* (1960)

So what, then, is the wendigo, really? At some level, the wendigo personifies the spirit of the lonely places; he is a malign genius loci for a dangerous country. Much like the Arabic ghul, the wendigo is the fear of desolation given form. The howl of the wendigo is the roar of the north wind, bringing snow and bitter cold to the tribes huddled together for warmth and food. The wendigo also personifies the basic cultural fears of the Algonquin: losing control either emotionally or on a more personal level (the Ojibway and Cree valued both calm and individuality), madness and isolation (omnipresent dangers in nomadic forest societies), and, of course, hunger. Hunting societies live on the knife edge of survival -- especially when they have to trade their furs to the Hudson's Bay Company to get the knife in the first place. Again like the ghul, the wendigo personifies the fear of starvation in [the waste land](#) and the urge to eat corpses -- or even fresh human flesh.

Anthropologists, and to a lesser extent psychologists, studying the Cree and Ojibway in the 1930s began to mention "windigo psychosis" -- an apparently culturally-driven syndrome among Northern Algonquin leading to autism, religious delusions, and cannibalistic mania. Many Algonquin, it turns out, had projected these cultural fears not onto some misty demon in the wilderness, but onto themselves or each other. Accusations of "windigo" led to hasty trials, suicides, and even executions in the 1890s; victims of "windigo psychosis" believed themselves possessed as they wailed, clawed at friends and family members (whom they hallucinated as food animals), and refused food -- just as the myths had predicted.

"From these beginnings the misunderstandings snowballed. It could even be argued that the windigo phenomenon is more of an example of mass suggestibility among anthropologists than among Northern Algonkians."

-- Lou Marano, "Windigo Psychosis: The Anatomy of an Emic-Etic Confusion," in *Current Anthropology*, Aug 1982

However, when the cases come under closer scrutiny, the notion of a unified "windigo psychosis" disintegrates. There is not, it turns out, a single documented, first-hand case of Algonquin psychotic cannibalism on record. What does show up in the histories, however, is a vast record of "crisis cannibalism" driven by the increasingly severe famines, plagues, and environmental dislocations that the Europeans unleashed on the Canadian wilderness. Jesuit missionaries mention Indians forced to eat each other in the 1660s; a century later, Hudson's Bay trappers referred to famine-driven cannibal attacks as "common occurrences." Like almost all human societies, the Algonquin have a strong cultural horror of cannibalism -- the wendigo reports (and trials) should be seen as their desperate attempt to explain the apocalypse around them, similar to demon visitations and witchcraft persecutions in West Africa, the Navajo country -- or France and Germany. Like earlier Inquisitors, modern psychiatrists and anthropologists unwittingly spread their own psychosis through the questions they asked the suffering Algonquin (or, more often, their grandchildren). Modern cases of "windigo psychosis," under examination, turn out to be similarly contaminated cases of ordinary anorexia, depression, or mental illness.

"How yummy," Grossmann had commented wryly. Sure, it was amusing, in a twisted sort of way. And it gave anthropologists something to write about and people at parties something to talk about. Fascinating, this Windigo psychosis. And oddly enough its first stages were marked by a profound melancholia."

-- Thomas Pynchon, "Morality and Mercy in Vienna"

Which raises an interesting parallel with the "werewolf manias" in France in the 1590s, 1630s, and 1790s -- during, as it happened, times of serious famine that intermittently reached crisis proportions in France's civil wars. The historic French werewolf, as it turns out, is a pretty good match for the wendigo -- furry and bestial, ravening for human flesh, "possessed" by a demonic spirit in most cases, often detectable by animalistic feet (again like the Arabic ghul) or footprints. Medical writers as early as the 17th century agreed that lycanthropy was, in Pynchon's words above, "marked by a profound melancholia" -- an excess of black bile pumped, no doubt, from an icy heart of madness. The French-Canadian Metis, who married into the Algonquin tribes, recognized the similarity; they call wendigo and werewolf alike "loup-garou." Perhaps the howls of the [werewolf](#) and the wendigo are the same agonizing cry of mad

despair. Perhaps [Little Red Riding Hood's](#) cannibalistic feast and "devouring by the wolf" was her own initiation into the cults of the wendigo, and the woodsman came by with a dish of hot fat rather than a handy axe to set things right. And could the link with the wendigo's prodigious leaps, red eyes, and insatiable hunger explain the ferocity of the [Beast of Gévaudan?](#)

"A large thing, I am told, vaguely like a man, yet infinitely unlike him. Details are very distorted and unreliable. It is said to have been an air elemental, but there are weird hints of something of incredible age, that rose out of the hidden fastness in the far north, from a frozen and impenetrable plateau up there. Of this I can venture nothing."
-- August Derleth, "The Thing That Walked on the Wind"

Once we've released the wolves, of course, we can follow the trail of the wendigo anywhere. The spectral hounds of [the Wild Hunt](#) are the wendigo in all but name, racing across the winter sky snatching up the unwary. In other Germanic legendry, of course, we have Beowulf's famished foe. Although the linguistic connection between "wendigo" and "Grendel" is less than tenuous, the folkloric one seems sounder -- a stinking, demonic, hairy, cannibalistic monster that stalks the Waste Land. (Grendel's association with water doesn't necessarily disqualify him -- there's plenty of "Windigo Lake" place-names, along with malevolent shore-creatures, in the northern mythoi.) The Vikings and Algonquin did, of course, interact for a few decades -- probably spending much of that time as each others' demons -- and at least one source attests to wendigo beliefs in Inuit Greenland or even Norse Iceland! Both the Inuit and the Algonquin accused each other of demonic cannibalism -- "Eskimo" comes from the Algonquin *eskimantsik*, or "he eats raw". Were the wendigowak stalking the boundaries between the tribes?

On the other side of the Arctic, another interesting allophony joins "wendigo" and *mi-go* -- the Tibetan name for the mysterious entity that leaves enormous footprints across inaccessible glaciers. We also know him as the Abominable Snowman, another hairy, stinking monster -- whose cousin, the Sasquatch, roams the same Canadian forests as does the wendigo. Their legends often overlap; in 1924, the Scottish adventurer James Rennie was pursued across a frozen lake by an invisible entity leaving enormous tracks -- his French-Canadian guide, "reduced to gibbering terror", identified them as wendigo. These invisible monsters of the air ring further familiar changes on our carillon of suppressed entities -- the red eyes of both creature and victim recall the [Mothman](#) (as does the flight and panic fear), the mad leaps summon up [Spring-Heeled Jack](#), shapeshifting cannibals evoke the [manticores](#), and the bringers of madness from heaven can only be Algonquin [Nephilim](#). In the modern era of freeze-dried food and jet travel, the wendigo seemingly lurks in remission. Traditionally, only another giant could kill a wendigo -- perhaps [Paul Bunyan](#) still walks the North Woods listening for the howl of the Death-Walker; his stories saw print almost precisely when wendigo reports ceased. Does the U.S. military keep the wendigowak at bay using [HAARP](#) technology? Have the [Antarctic Space Nazis](#) tried recruiting an Arctic [Werewolf](#) auxiliary from among the giants of the North? Make any kind of stew you want from the wendigo and its associated ingredients -- but don't eat the meat.

Asgard As My Witness

In the old days many cultures had pantheons of gods; these beings had phenomenal powers over the universe itself, yet possessed very human attitudes and emotions . . . jealousy, passion, anger, and pettiness.

As far as theories go, it has a certain elegance. Why is there suffering? Because Zeus is having a tiff with Hera, and you're caught in the middle. Why is there thunder? Because Thor is bowling. Tick off the gods and you might find yourself turned into a pig.

Anyway, the "gods among men" power level is the pinnacle of gaming power . . . at least, from an individual character's point of view. Threats that would incapacitate or devastate ordinary mortals don't even faze these heroes (unless they want them to).

Playing beings of godlike power is not, generally (and perhaps surprisingly), a munchkin-fest. The base assumption of a munchkin game is that the characters seek to escalate their abilities through using and abusing the system; their characters are different than those would be were the game played as intended. ("Most fighters can't kill a titan with a dagger in one blow, but I'm special because I've got the special ability 'Death Slice' combined with the Dagger of Division!") In contract, a gods-among-men game *assumes* the characters are able to perform these feats. ("Okay; you can kill any ordinary creature in one blow. Now what?")

This kind of power level can be quite challenging to roleplay; the base assumed "victory condition" in most RPGs is survival, with the accumulation of Stuff (loot, knowledge, power) as a secondary reward. But if survival is assured (or virtually such) and the accumulation of Stuff limited by the inclination of the character, then what? If you can change atomic structures, turning anything into gold, the accumulation of wealth becomes meaningless.

Goals and Motivations

Perhaps more so than any other power level, the ultra-high-power level requires characters to have defined goals and motivations. These can come from without, such as *In Nomine's* superiors issuing commands; from within, like having a desire to do Good, a drive for Absolute Knowledge and Truth, or a wish to exact vengeance upon those who abuse children; or from both, like Odin issuing a command to recover a lost artifact on Midgard, which gives some a chance to even some old scores.

Without these goals, preparing (or participating in) adventures can be very difficult; as stated above, traditional rewards and threats generally aren't an option for these games. And while it's usually possible to dangle a *really* big carrot to get characters motivated once or twice, coming up with a meaningful supply of cosmic carrots is usually challenging beyond belief.

This is also a good time to consider whether the ultra-powered heroes will generally be proactive or reactive. Reactive is generally the norm, although (depending) it can be fairly unrealistic; here the characters sit around, playing Euchre or whatever, waiting for the call from the President, the order from the Superior, or mighty opponents to bash down their headquarters, screaming, "DeiTeam! Now you shall die!" This is most classically the purview of four-color supers (although *In Nomine* uses it a fair bit, too). It's fun, and requires less work on the players' and GM's part; since the players don't need to worry about coming up with their own plots, and the GM doesn't need to worry about finding

How powerful do you like your characters to be in RPGs you play in, compared to the rest of the populace?	
Gods among men! I like really powerful characters. (Four-Colored Supers, High Magic, <i>In Nomine</i>)	2%
Powerful! I like characters with abilities far different from normal people. (<i>Vampire</i> , <i>Mage</i> , Jedi)	8%
Highly competent! I like characters that are still human, but incredibly skilled. (Batman, James Bond, <i>Black Ops</i>)	13%
Competent! I like characters that are human, but still more skilled than normal folks. (<i>X-Files</i> , <i>Dungeons & Dragons</i> , <i>Call of Cthulhu</i>)	33%
Normal! I like my characters human. (some <i>Traveller</i> games)	4%
Men among gods! I like playing weak characters among very strong forces. (<i>Bunnies & Burrows</i>)	0%
It depends. I like playing lots of different power levels.	36%
Dude! I don't roleplay!	0%

a way to introduce plot. But, as has been noted, it's not the most realistic method in the world. When you have the power to move mountains, why would you do nothing, waiting for Kilimanjaro to ring your doorbell? Still, this can be easy enough to rectify with some plot devices; perhaps there is a Treaty of Noninterference that all sides agree to, keeping the characters from taking direct action. Perhaps someone with similar powers *has* attempted to take direct control in the past, with dire consequences. Perhaps there is ultra-powered opposition as well, making a direct proactive policy dangerous.

The other option, proactive, is more realistic, but more work. It entails the players coming up with goals and plans, and the GM either making up consequences and results on the fly, or pacing the game so that those sorts of decisions only come up at the end of game. The proactive approach has seen increased popularity of late, appearing as parts of comics like *The Authority* and *Ultimate X-Men*. And it has often been a part of other high-powered settings, like *Amber* and high-end *Mage* games. This kind of proactive focus, although difficult to maintain, is quite satisfying when it works; after all, if a character has the power to change the world, then it should be fun and interesting to actually change it!

Opposition

Of course, the reactive/proactive debate can depend on where the primary opposition will be coming from. Here are a few ideas.

Similar powered beings. In most high-powered campaigns, the opposition will come from others of the same (or similar) power to the character. This is logical, in that others of the same power are perhaps the only ones who can sufficiently challenge the heroes. But it can also be problematic, in that it somewhat negates the uniqueness of the PCs. For example, two identical vehicles attacking each other are evenly matched, comparatively speaking; it doesn't matter terribly much if it's two armored Toyotas blazing away at each other, or two twelve-story tall cybertanks. The conflict will be similar, although the collateral damage will be different. It is, perhaps, in the "collateral damage" where the interest in similar conflicts lies; in most games this will refer to human life. After all, if the heroes care that their conflict will destroy Saskatoon, then that may give them some pause before they engage the enemy.

Outside of four-color superheroes, however, it's fairly uncommon to see direct conflict among beings of similar power. Many of the stories with a comparable opposition revolve instead around battles of intrigue, politics, wagers, and other games. "Which of us can make that mortal woman completely devote her life to our cause?" . . . that sort of thing.

Regardless, if there *are* opposing characters of similar ultra-high power levels as the PCs, it's important to keep the fact that, even if they are evenly matched, they are still incredibly powerful. This is probably best emphasized by having a plethora of situations where their powers *do* solve problems effortlessly.

No real opposition. One of the more intriguing ways to emphasize a super-powered game is for there not to be any real opposition directly. Sure, there may be mortal authorities who oppose the heroes, but they won't prove much of a threat . . . at least, not in direct conflict. In this way the world really *is* open for the heroes; what do they want to do today? (Ironically, if all the PCs are on a similar power level, then they may well come into conflict primarily with each other . . . which can lead to a very interesting game.) Alan Moore's and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen* deals with just such a situation, where Dr. Manhattan is the sole being of his power level; a fair bit of the thrust of the story comes from the conflict of those who wish to use him, and his ultimate decisions regarding how he will interact with humanity.

Greater opposition. Perhaps, incredibly, there is a threat of an even *greater* magnitude. This doesn't necessarily mean a direct conflict, although it can; perhaps, like the *Strikeforce Moratori* comic series, the planet is under siege by technologically advanced aliens bent on conquest, and it falls to the sole powerful heroes to try and save the planet. But the threat may be more ephemeral; what if the heroes are somehow prophetic, and they comprehend that the world is doomed to complete ecological failure unless they succeed in averting its fate? Even with unimaginable powers, swaying six billion sentients to adapt an entirely new paradigm will be a Herculean effort.

Or perhaps the heroes are limited by the scope of their goal and motivation; if they are charged with seeking out all

anomalies in the timestream, then that's a significant amount of ground to cover, even with phenomenal powers. Such an open mandate can allow for a lot of exploration of ultra-powered themes, while still providing significant conflict that doesn't revolve around fighting equally powered bad guys.

Limitations

Godlike powers are similar, ironically, to the Moderately Skilled humans, in that it's important to know the limitations of the abilities. This is not as important from the point of view of the characters - how many gods lie awake at night trying to figure out if their freeze breath can snuff the sun? - but for the players and GM. After all, if everyone decides that Strongmon can't move anything heavier than the moon, then it's inappropriate to craft a story where he needs to push the Earth out of the way of an asteroid. Fortunately, most RPGs are pretty good about supplying limits to the abilities of characters . . . but this isn't always the case. Some games provide blanket powers that can be open to interpretation, especially when compared to other powers. The classic example, of course, is Marvel's Juggernaut (who can't be stopped when he runs) versus the Blob (who can't be moved when he's rooted); what happens when those two collide? Probably the easiest way to resolve this issue is to come up with a list of "house rules" that gets updated the moment a final decision gets made.

Also important in this idea is how the heroes limit themselves. For example, when Clark Kent loses his job at the Daily Planet, it shouldn't be much of a problem; after all, his alter ego of Superman has more than enough abilities to acquire or fabricate more wealth than he could ever use. But he considers that cheating. Codes against killing, obligations to others (or humanity), and even bona fide weaknesses (ala Xenonite) can provide the framework for the character; without it, coming up with meaningful conflicts can be difficult.

Psychology

Coming up with the philosophies, beliefs, and mindset of ultra-powerful characters is perhaps more important than other power levels. Unfortunately, given the character's detachment from humanity (by definition) this can be difficult; coming up with a philosophy for existence that emphasizes the alien nature of the character's abilities while still being suitable for roleplaying is a pretty tall order. But that makes it all the more necessary; there isn't a "default" mode you can pilot the character on (unless you *want* the Cosmic Wanderer to act like a 20-year-old junior at the state college).

For some games this is easier; four-color superheroes tend to do superheroic things because . . . well, that's what they do. They may have abilities far beyond those of mortal men, but that doesn't mean they can't enjoy a steak when in their secret identities. For other games this can be a real challenge; perhaps the easiest way to get a handle on the character's mind is to take the advice from last week's column regarding the mindset about having powers, and taking it to the logical extreme. For example, if you were created as a god and have lived for five thousand years, what kind of view does that give you on mortal relationships? What does the world *smell* like compared to your "youth"? Are you patient because time marches on, or impatient because you've spent millennia being patient with little result? What projects have you worked on; have they grown to be proud monuments, or crumbled to dust? And so on.

A "gods among men" game can be a great challenge for roleplayers, and give them a focus beyond the usual acquisition of power, wealth, and fame: When they start with all those things, where do characters go from there? But, like most roleplaying, many of the challenges are similar (even if the means of resolving them are different). With realistic and consistent motivation and goals, known limits, and an understanding of what the characters can hope to accomplish (and who will seek to stop them), you can create a memorable campaign the gods would be jealous of.

And then they'll turn you into a pig.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Aberrant RPG**, p. 60.*

(One star) "Omar Strauss moves to Al Amarja 5 years ago to try to break into the island's music scene. With the money he'd saved up in his native Germany, he flew to the island and purchased an abandoned warehouse, cleaned it out, and created The House of Strauss."

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Victorian Archetypes in a Steampunk World

or

"Good Heavens [your character's name here], those are the [fill in the blank] of a giant [fill in the blank]!"

by Jess Nevins

William Stoddard's *GURPS Steampunk* is an excellent guide to roleplaying in a steampunk world, and the following is in no way meant as a critique of it. However, one thing *GURPS Steampunk*, like most steampunk games, does not cover is the wide variety of quite gameable concepts that can be found in Victorian literature, both High (mainstream fiction) and Low (penny dreadfuls and story papers). Every player and GM wants to be original, but using ideas which are genuinely Victorian in origin and tone can only help a campaign. To that end, here are nine Victorian archetypes, their historical sources and contexts, and some possible uses for them in a *GURPS Steampunk* campaign.

Adventuresses

The role of women in Victorian society was quite different from today's popular stereotype. There were certainly societal pressures applied to women to act in the ways that we think of today as stereotypically Victorian. But there were many women who were not confined to the morality of the upper classes and who not only acted independently but flaunted their unconventional lifestyles. And further contrary to the current popular stereotype, many of these women, from demi-mondaines to world travelers to reporters, were not only not socially ostracized by Victorian high society but were in fact accepted into the most exclusive parties and occasions, idolized by many young women, watched with admiration by mothers and daughters, and had their fashions copied by "respectable" women. High society often did not condemn these women but instead celebrated them as daringly unconventional.

This was reflected in Victorian literature and in the surprisingly large amount of adventure and mystery fiction in which the heroines, female love interests, or adversaries of the male hero were significantly more independent and less subservient than modern readers would imagine of Victorian-era fictional heroines. The obvious example is Irene Adler, who so memorably stymied Sherlock Holmes in "A Scandal in Bohemia." She is hardly the first adventuress, however. "L____," the first of at least two dozen female professional detectives in Victorian literature, appeared in 1837, four years before Poe's Dupin debuted in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"; the first British novel to feature a female detective, William S. Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, appeared in 1861, 26 years before Holmes' debut. Victorian literature had female adventurer-explorers, such as Adolphe Belot's Laura de Guéran (from *A Parisian Sultana*, 1879). There are female Anarchists, including the formidable Zalma de Pahlen (from T. Mullett Ellis' *Zalma*, 1895). There were even female arch-criminals, such as the infernal Madame Sara, from L.T. Meade's *The Sorceress of the Strand* (1903).

The commonly used term during the Victorian era for independent women of this kind was "adventuress." The adventuresses was a part of the Victorian consciousness and can be freely used in a Steampunk world. A *GURPS Steampunk-Old West* campaign might have friends or competitors of Annie Oakley strolling into London on missions of vengeance or simply as tourists. The Great Detective who helps the players solve the Whitechapel murders could easily be a woman. A *GURPS Steampunk-Rogues* campaign might feature a set of sisters who are demure merchants' daughters by day and second-story women by night. You could redo *GURPS Scarlet Pimpernel*, only set against a Steampunk background and with a party of female adventurers smuggling intellectuals, Jews, and other innocents out from the horrors of Tsarist Russia, or helping African nobleman or European protestors escape from Leopold II's "Congo Free State." In a *GURPS Steampunk-Atlantis* campaign the Clockwork Armies of Leopold's Belgians might besiege an Atlantean colony -- Kôr, perhaps -- in the Congo, and it would be up to a group of adventuresses, dressed as nuns or as the followers of Florence Nightingale, to rescue them.

Aliens

The Victorians were fascinated by the idea of aliens. The notion of life on other planets certainly predated the 19th century, as did fictional portrayals of aliens, but the late 19th century saw the first real flowering of what today we think of as science fiction featuring aliens. H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* (1897) is the archetypal Victorian alien story, and while there were stories of alien invasions before *War of the Worlds* -- France and Brazil were invaded in Guy de Maupassant's "The Horla" (1887), Australia was invaded in Robert Potter's *The Germ Growers* (1892), and the North Pole was invaded in Kurd Lasswitz's *Between Two Planets* (1897) -- Wells' Martians have always been the quintessential hostile Victorian aliens. But Victorian writers portrayed aliens as having natures other than hostile. Some are tourists, as with the Venusian Aleriel in the Reverend Lach-Szyrma's *A Voice From Another World* (1882) and the Neptunian Zoe in Charles Rowcroft's *The Triumphs of Woman* (1848). Some are friendly ambassadors who fall victim to humanity's evils, as with the Marsman, a victim of vivisection, in Ritson & Stanley Stewart's *The Professor's Last Experiment* (1888). And in stories and novels too numerous to mention humans traveling to other planets encountered aliens of a wide variety of personalities.

Naturally, this all will work well in a Steampunk campaign. **GURPS Steampunk** already more than adequately covered the possibilities for meeting aliens on planets, but the possibilities are endless for campaigns involving aliens visiting Earth. The War of the Worlds could easily be adapted to a Steampunk campaign. A **GURPS Steampunk-Illuminati-Black Ops-Special Ops** campaign is one of the more obvious choices, especially if the meteor landing at Horsell Common is met not by bemused civilians but by a squad of MI5 Men in Black Invernesses. In a **GURPS Steampunk-Illuminati** campaign the Martians might be defeated not by an ordinary virus, but an Illuminati-designed retrovirus. Or perhaps, in a **GURPS Steampunk-Delta Green/Black Ops** campaign, the Illuminati didn't design the virus - the Illuminati are allied with the Martians - but someone else did, either a counter-conspiracy or Someone Else lurking beneath the Pacific, not dead, only sleeping, who already called dibs on Earth and isn't welcoming to newcomers.

Alien invasions, though, were only a small part of Victorian fantastic literature, and you needn't use them at all. The aliens might be just tourists, slumming among the provincials or lured here by the galactic reputation of Atlantis (**GURPS Steampunk-Places of Mystery**) or the Plateau of Leng. Perhaps the aliens are from not just another solar system but another timeline altogether and have come back to see Earth in the days before Boskone (**GURPS Steampunk-Lensmen-Time Travel**) began to corrupt the galaxy. Or, just possibly, they aren't aliens at all, just Centran agents (**GURPS Steampunk-Time Travel**) with TL10 illusion casters? If so, Infinity Unlimited agents surely can't be far behind. Make your campaign the destination of the Time Travelers rather than the starting point, and watch the Time Travelers' when their their stunners are met with Hand Flashers.

Anarchists

The mid- and late-nineteenth century was a time of great unease for the Victorians. Many of the social and religious certainties were changing or disappearing, from social caste to Man's place in the universe. One of the most unnerving changes for the Victorians was the disappearance of safety from Britain, which had formerly been preserved from foreign harm by the English Channel. Not only was there the perceived threat of Communist subversion of the working classes, there was the very real threat of anarchism and terrorism. The worst episode of terrorism was the Fenian Brotherhood dynamite campaign in the 1880s across southern Britain, which culminated with Fenian dynamitards placing "infernal machines" (bags of dynamite) in the Palace of Westminster and the Tower of London in January 1885.

To the Victorians these acts were shocking, and this shock was reflected in the fiction of the time. Turn of the century treatments of these "anarchists" treated the subject less seriously, as in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) and Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), but in the 1880s and 1890s, when the dynamitards were active, Victorian authors took anarchists quite seriously, portraying them in numerous short stories, serials, and novels as wickedness personified. Sometimes they were portrayed as pure evil; Dr. Schultz, in Edward Jenkins' *A Week of Passion* (1884), "continues the work of Satan by sowing the seeds of evil in the world" and "would commit a crime . . . simply for the excitement and peril of the thing." Sometimes they were shown as ruthless, thrill-seeking political fanatics; Virginia Claire, in J.H. Shorthouse's *Sir Percival* (1886), is a duke's niece who is also a "petroleuse" and the

"sworn enemy" of the English social system. Sometimes they were portrayed as immoral agents of foreign powers; Lady Bretwyche, of Frances Notley's *Red Riding Hood* (1883), is in the employ of the Russians and will stop at nothing to hurt England and help the Motherland. Some portrayals were even positive: Zalma von der Pahlen, in T. Mullett Ellis' *Zalma* (1895), tries to drop anthrax-infested balloons into every capital in Europe, but the novel shows Zalma (the main character) a great deal of understanding if not sympathy. And Natas, in George Griffith's *Angel of the Revolution* (1893), is a brilliant anarchist whose torture at the hands of the Russian government leads to his retaliation against it, his eventual conquest of the world, and the imposition of a New World Order, along the lines of an armed and enforced world peace. Natas, in *Angel*, is the hero.

Anarchists are an essential part of the late 19th century British experience, and their addition to a *GURPS Steampunk* campaign would inject an authentically Victorian note into the proceedings. *GURPS Steampunk-Special Ops-Espionage* is the most obvious choice, with hand-picked agents of the British government's Intelligence Department (the Victorian equivalent of the CIA) tracking down agents of a foreign power. Perhaps a group of goblins (*GURPS Steampunk-Goblins*) have gone beyond griping about the government and decided to do something violent about it. The anarchy could also be just an unfortunate by-product of a greater secret war, either between Heaven and Hell (*GURPS Steampunk-In Nomine*) or between the League of Notable Gentlepersons and the August Emperor in Ruby (*GURPS Steampunk-Supers*). Or perhaps, in a *GURPS Steampunk-Cthulhu-by-Gaslight* campaign, the dynamitards are from another, even more secret branch of the Intelligence Department, using the most powerful weapons they possess against enemies not just of the crown, but of all humanity. Your players may discover that the choice between apprehending the "anarchists" or letting them go on to more "terrorist" acts is really no choice at all. While the Victorian era was not full of moral ambiguity, steampunk fiction is, and Anarchists can be great vehicles for conveying that.

Edisonades

The Edisonade is a somewhat obscure character type, one not given nearly the attention in steampunk texts that other Victorian archetypes have been shown. This is due in large part to the American, rather than British, origin of the character type. But the Edisonade is nonetheless Victorian in origin and tone.

The Edisonade is a young, male, American inventor who uses his inventions to travel to distant locations, escape from difficulties, kill his enemies (who are almost always non-white), and enrich himself while defeating the enemies of Right, as defined by provincial 19th century Americans. Edisonade inventions are usually technologically advanced steam- (and later electricity-) powered vehicles, heavily armed and capable of speeds almost unthinkable to the Edisonade's contemporaries. These vehicles allow the Edisonade to steal from and slaughter dozens or hundreds of natives, from Native Americans to Lost Race Aztecs and Incans to Africans.

The five major Edisonades were Johnny Brainerd, from Edward Ellis' "The Huge Hunter" (1868), Frank Reade, created by Harold Cohen and first appearing in "Frank Reade and his Steam Man of the Plains" (1876), Tom Edison, Jr., created by "Philip Reade" and first appearing in "Tom Edison, Jr.'s Sky-Scraping Trip" (1891), Jack Wright, created by Luis Senarens and first appearing in "Jack Wright, the Boy Inventor" (1891), and Electric Bob, created by Robert Toombs and first appearing in "Electric Bob and His White Alligator" (1893). All match the definition given above, with only Electric Bob not continually displaying ethnic biases.

The traditional Edisonade, the brilliant inventor of advanced steam vehicles and weapons, will not seem so revolutionary in a steampunk world: Johnny Brainerd's Steam Man, so singular and unusual in "The Huge Hunter," is nothing more than a human-shaped Iron Horse. But the importance of the Edisonade, and the character's essential playability in a *GURPS Steampunk* campaign, lies in the character's genius, especially when compared to those around him. The Edisonade is always the most brilliant and heroic man in his world; those around him can be smart, and his enemies, who also make advanced vehicles and weapons, are always intelligent, but the Edisonade is more brilliant still.

In a *GURPS Steampunk* campaign an Edisonade could be building TL10 mechas and using them to adventure abroad; the Edisonade would still be a genius compared to his contemporaries. The Edisonade could be the Miles Dyson who

causes the steam-A.I.s to band together and overthrow humanity in a *GURPS Steampunk-Reign of Steel* campaign, or merely creates super-tanks in a *GURPS Steampunk-Ogre* campaign. Or the Edisonade could have already come and gone, a victim of the Illuminati, and the supervehicles could be currently gathering dust in the Steampunk Britain equivalent of Warehouse 23.

But the nature of the Edisonade would be shown best by making him (or her -- just because the traditional Edisonade was always a racist white male does not mean the Edisonade in your campaign has to be) a genius in areas where no one else is, both scientifically and geographically. So you could have a Haitian Edisonade who uses the gifts of the loa to build giant aircrafts made from human and animal bones (*GURPS Steampunk-Voodoo*); the other hounsans would be astounded at the strength of the Edisonade's spells, and the outside world would be shocked that magic and voodoo are real. A *GURPS Steampunk-Bio-tech* game could have a successful Dr. Moreau type making living warships (see the Human-Made Monsters below) out of whale/shark crossbreeds and terrorizing the world's shipping with his creations. An Edisonade in a *GURPS Steampunk-Psionics* campaign might create deadly aircraft using the power of her mind. Perhaps the Edisonade has somehow accessed technomancy (*GURPS Steampunk-Technomancer*). An Edisonade who has mastered a Weird Science that the rest of humanity barely understands and which is at odds with the steampunk science of the world would retain the nature of the originals while still being gameable. In *GURPS Steampunk* terms, this kind of Edisonade might exist in a TL (5+1) world but create TL (4+2) tech.

Future War

The Victorians were uneasy in victory. Even before they became the virtual masters of the world, they worried about Britain losing status and suffering military defeat. Beginning in 1871 with George Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking*, dozens of Future War stories, short stories and serials and novels were published in which England was invaded and conquered, or simply threatened with the same. The cause of the Future War varies; sometimes it is Asian enmity (see *The Yellow Danger*, under Yellow Perils below), sometimes it is the hatred of the Germans, or the Russians, or the French, as in George Griffith's "The Raid of Le Vengeur" (1901), or both the French and the Russians, as in Fred Jane's Blake of the "Rattlesnake" (1895), and sometimes it is Anarchists. But war was coming, many of these books forecast, and Britain would suffer; if Britain finally triumphed, it was only at the cost of tens of thousands of casualties and the destruction of Britain and much of the Empire.

A Future War Campaign set in a Steampunk world can be taken in many directions. World War One might take place a few decades early in a *GURPS Steampunk-WW2* campaign full of steam mechas and dirigibles rampaging across Europe and Russia. If you want to invoke the threat of the Asian Hordes, the scale of the war could be global, and the discovery that the Asians, lacking steam technology, fall back on magic (in a *GURPS Steampunk-Magic* genre clash) will increase the fervor of the clash as well as the casualty count. The Storyteller can throw a corkscrew twist into the campaign by having an Asian sorcerer invoke a final, terrible spell, one that negates all steam power and sets humanity back centuries. In this *GURPS Steampunk-Magic-Y2K-Low Tech* campaign the players, now forced to rely on brute strength and pursued by the spells and magical monsters of the evil Asian occupiers, range across a ruined and powerless London, fighting the invaders and searching for a power source that the magics won't negate. Bring the Greys into it, and suddenly England's fighting not just for the Queen but for all humanity -- unless the Queen Herself is one of the Greys' pawns. If the Future War involves magic, perhaps one of the byproducts is the return of supposedly mythical creatures (*GURPS Steampunk-Fantasy Bestiary*). If the Future War uses only steamtech, one of the byproducts might be warped and mutated animals (*GURPS Steampunk-Atomic Horrors*).

Great Detectives

The figure of the Great Detective is perhaps the most familiar of all the Victorian characters, due to the ongoing popularity of Sherlock Holmes. And A. Conan Doyle, through Holmes, was almost entirely responsible for the change in the portrayal of detectives in Victorian literature from stolid Inspector Bucket (from Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* in 1853) police-types to incisive consulting gentleman detectives widely admired by all around them and capable of great feats of inductive and deductive reasoning.

But Holmes is not the first Great Detective in Victorian literature, nor even the first detective with with what we today

think of as Holmesian characteristics. Great Detective characters appeared before Holmes' 1887 debut, with the Holmes-like James Brooke appearing in James Skipp Borlase's *The Night Fossickers* in 1867 and the very Holmes-like Maximilien Heller appearing in Henri Cauvain's *Maximilien Heller* in 1871. Great Detective characters appeared contemporaneously with Holmes, most notably Arthur Morrison's *Martin Hewitt*, who debuted in the pages of *The Strand* in 1894. And Great Detectives continued to appear after the last Holmes story, the most popular being Sexton Blake, whose Golden Age was in the 1920s and 1930s.

Great Detectives are quite Victorian in tone, and can add a great deal to any Steampunk campaign. Players may likely want to play a Great Detective, but this isn't a problem; there can be more than one Great Detective, or competing Great Detectives. The other Great Detective can be part of the Illuminati, or working against the Illuminati, or entirely unaware of the Illuminati, or could be a myth created by the Illuminati to fool the public; after all, how much of the London population ever actually saw the reclusive and disguise-loving Sherlock Holmes? What if the Great Detective turns out to be not quite human (*GURPS Steampunk-Aliens/Goblins/Spirits*)? What if the Great Detective only *used* to be human (*GURPS Steampunk-Blood Types*)? An undead Great Detective could add a Kim Newman frisson to your game. And your Great Detective needn't be a master of reasoning alone, or at all; what if the source of his genius turns out to be extremely potent scrying and clairvoyance spells (*GURPS Steampunk-Magic*)? A psionic Great Detective is a natural, if you're bent that way (*GURPS Steampunk-Psionics*), and the brain with the psionics needn't be a human one (see Human-Made Monsters, below). Finally, who says the Great Detective has to be a good guy? Guy Boothby's Simon Carne, a gentleman thief who debuted in 1897, posed as the brilliant detective Klimo in order to facilitate his crimes. Perhaps the Great Detective in your campaign could do the same. Great Detectives can be fun; Great Detectives who are not what the players expect are even more fun.

Human Monsters

Victorian fiction is replete with humans who are, for whatever reason, different from or better than other humans. With the rise of science fiction as a discernible literary genre and the commercialization of the popular press, increasing numbers of stories were written which used themes formerly seen in fairy tales or which incorporated current concerns (evolution, the dangers of too much scientific experimentation) into a science fictional framework. Many times these themes were embodied in an individual, to better explore the themes or demonstrate the pros or cons of a specific issue.

The most familiar example of these Human Monsters is Dr. Jekyll, from Robert L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). There were numerous others, though, and they are just as gameable as Dr. Jekyll: the energy vampire Julius Courtney (from J. Cobben's *Master of His Fate*, 1890), the super-fast Professor Gibberne (from H.G. Wells' "A New Accelerator," 1899), the shape-changing priestess of Isis (from Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*, 1897), the mesmerist Ptahmes, former wizard to the Pharaohs (from Guy Boothby's *Pharos the Egyptian*, 1899), the detective Seligman, who has clairvoyant "second-sight" (from W.I. James' "Heller's Pupil," 1894), and so on. The Victorians had a surprising taste for stories in which the protagonists or villains possessed superhuman abilities. There were even stories in which characters were given these powers, comic-book-style, as in Arthur Conan Doyle's "Los Amigos Fiasco" (1892), in which a convict is rendered invulnerable and immortal from a botched electrocution, and in Edgar Fawcett's "The Ghost of Guy Thyrlle" (1895), in which Guy Thyrlle, while experimenting with astral projection, is stuck in that form.

These characters don't need to be monstrous, and in a good Steampunk campaign many characters like this won't be, but in Victorian literature many of them are. "Monstrous" needn't equal "evil," either -- some of the Human Monsters were quite well-meaning. But thanks to flukes of genetics or experimentation, these beings are all different from ordinary humans and are gifted or cursed with extraordinary abilities. These sorts of characters can be easily included in a *GURPS Steampunk-Supers* campaign, where men and women with unusual abilities can lurk around every corner. Magic, religion, or psionics could cause these abilities, depending on what the GM wants to include in his campaign. An authentically Victorian campaign might have the Human Monsters as unusual eruptions of the monstrous and aberrant into an otherwise ordinary world, so that everyone is normal except for the one monster, which can lead to a *GURPS Steampunk-Horror* campaign or perhaps a *GURPS Steampunk-Horror-Supers* campaign in which the superpowered human thinks that he or she is a monster, but is really just a Super.

The aforementioned Julius Courtney might be a mutant who only thinks he's a vampire. There are other paths to take to incorporate Human Monsters into a steampunk campaign. A superpowered Fenian Anarchist could be an immortal Cuchulain (*GURPS Steampunk-Celtic Myth*). The person who's been killing all the criminals of London might be a Lensman (*GURPS Steampunk-Lensman*), in pursuit of time- or space-traveling Eddorians. Or the cause of someone's unusual vitality and recuperative abilities is the alien living inside his body (*GURPS Steampunk-Black Ops*) or the experiments he's performed on himself (*GURPS Steampunk-Bio-Tech*).

Human-made monsters (HMMs)

One of the recurring themes of Victorian literature is scientific curiosity leading to disaster, of questers after knowledge learning things that Man Was Not Meant To Know. In many cases these experiments created monsters; scientists tampering with the natural order of things inevitably created unnatural beings, and these beings usually came to bad ends. We can see in these stories part of the Victorians' deep distrust with science which upset the natural order of things or which had men "playing God." The ultimate example of this is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1816), but Frankenstein's Monster was only one of many. The Beast People from Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) qualifies, as does Solarion, the sympathetic dog with a transplanted human brain from Edgar Fawcett's *Solarion* (1889). Other examples include the intelligent, childlike, vampiric humanoids from Louise Strong's "An Unscientific Story" (1903) and the brain-transplanted human "Baron Savitch" in E.P. Mitchell's "The Ablest Man in the World" (1879).

Although most Victorian HMMs were either human in form or had human parts in them, games needn't adhere to this. More efficient killing machines could be produced from crossbreeding wolverines and tigers or grafting their parts together; variant dinosaurs could be made from experiments on dinosaur bones and eggs. Transplanting a rat's brain into a body made of different animal parts might prove interesting. The possibilities are as endless as the animal kingdom. Perhaps the horrors of Whitechapel have returned, but this time the victims were torn apart not by a knife but by claws? In a *GURPS Steampunk-Men In Black-Bio-Tech* campaign Greys, assisted by their human lackeys, could be experimenting on citizens of the Crown and thereby creating HMMs. In a *GURPS Steampunk-Illuminati* campaign it might be an Illuminati-employed scientist who is creating HMMs from London's population, the better to foment fear and unrest and help the Illuminati more easily take power, or perhaps the scientist has gone rogue and the players have to find the scientist and his experiments before the Illuminati does. In a *GURPS Steampunk-Bunnies & Burrows* campaign, the players could be the animals experimented upon, and must face the fear and suspicion of humans and their fellow animals. The GM can play up the difference between Steampunk England and Steampunk America in a *GURPS Steampunk-Deadlands* campaign, with the players, stout Englishmen all, venture to America to investigate rumors of Indian sorceries and find, much to their regret, that the rumors are true. An additional layer of weirdness can be had in a "Valley of the Ultra Gwangi" *GURPS Steampunk-Deadlands-Dinosaurs* campaign; perhaps the Greys (*GURPS Steampunk-Deadlands-Dinosaurs-Men in Black*) are using Gwangi Valley as a scientific playground? Or perhaps the Valley of the Gwangi was the site of a previous nuclear blast, and the dinosaurs there are mutants (*GURPS Steampunk-Deadlands-Dinosaurs-Atomic Horror*)? Human-Made Monsters can serve the purpose of any monster in a roleplaying game, but the source of their creation can add a note of pathos or paranoia to your campaign.

Yellow Perils

The threat of the Yellow Peril -- that is, the Asian genius plotting to take over the West or the world -- did not begin with Arthur Ward's Fu Manchu. In 19th century British literature the identity of the Sinister and Enigmatic Outsider shifted from Italian to Asian; the portrayal of Japanese and Chinese men changed from coolie stereotypes and simple-minded peasants to drug addicts, sexual threats, and finally criminal and military masterminds -- the Yellow Peril.

The first true Yellow Peril is Kiang-Ho, a Mongolian pirate and warlord who invents a supersubmarine and used it to prey on Western ships in the Yellow Sea in "Philip Reade"'s "Tom Edison, Jr.'s Electric Sea Spider" (1892). The second Yellow Peril is Yue-Laou, from Robert Chambers' *The Maker of Moons* (1896), a powerful Chinese sorcerer as well as the ruler of an empire in the middle of China. The third Yellow Peril character is Dr. Yen How, in M.P. Shiel's

The Yellow Danger (1898). Dr. Yen How is a half-Japanese, half-Chinese warlord who connives his way to power in China, unites Japan and China, and then launches the armies of both countries at the West. The fifth Yellow Peril character is Quong Lung, from Dr. C.W. Doyle's *The Shadow of Quong Lung* (1900); Quong Lung, a Yale graduate, is also the most powerful crime lord in San Francisco and the undisputed ruler of that city's Chinatown.

What the preceding list shows is that the Yellow Peril does not have to be limited to a Fu Manchu-like character, a criminal mastermind hiding in the shadows and striking through his devoted followers. Yellow Perils can be military leaders, pirates, sorcerers, and local crime-lords. They can also be other things . . . academics, for example. Perhaps that new visiting professor (*GURPS Steampunk-IOU*) who has an unwholesome allure for the students has something more in mind than just raising the class GPA? A *GURPS Steampunk-China* campaign might have characters sent from the Heavenly Kingdom to London (or San Francisco or New York) to stop a Yellow Peril (a concubine who poses a threat to the Son of Heaven, perhaps, or the Emperor's disgraced nephew), or to help their rise to power. A *GURPS Steampunk-China-Martial Arts* campaign might reprise *Shanghai Noon*, but with Jackie Chan's character as the villain. A *GURPS Steampunk-Cabal* campaign could see the players working their way up the Yellow Peril's command structure and stopping the flow of opium into London until they encounter the Yellow Peril's lieutenant, who seems immune to bullets but who has an aversion to sunlight. Perhaps, in a *GURPS Steampunk-Cabal-China* campaign, the Yellow Peril has made an alliance with the Cabal, in which case the Yellow Peril might have imported Ch'ang-Shih from back home. And, following the Yue-Laou example given above, the players in a *GURPS Steampunk-Magic* campaign might discover that the Yellow Peril doesn't need a Steam Man to run across a plain at 50 miles an hour, or that the rumors of his magical power (spread by heathen superstitious Chinese) are the truth.

GURPS Steampunk provides a rich setting for a campaign. But the adept use of Victorian archetypes can add to the historical authenticity of a campaign as well as make for great fun. Alan Moore's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* did this, and benefited from it. *Big Trouble in Little China* has been waiting to be recast in a steampunk mode for quite some time; why shouldn't you be the one to do it? Change the focus from San Francisco to Limehouse, make the kidnaped vehicle Sir Jack Burton's Steam Carriage, and let the fun begin. Better yet, begin the game with Sir Jack taking his "Welsh Rarebit Express" to the Scottish border, and you've got yourself a perfect *GURPS Steampunk-Magic-Autoduel* setting. With *GURPS Steampunk* and some real Victorian character types anything is possible.

Bibliography

Although some of the more famous stories and novels mentioned here are easily found in bookstores and public libraries, many of these books have been out of print since for decades or even since their first appearances. While e-text Web sites like Project Gutenberg (<http://promo.net/pg/>) and the Online Books Page (<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/books/>) do have electronic versions of some of these otherwise out of print books, many others are not available online. Most libraries have some sort of Interlibrary Loan program by which rare books, like the ones mentioned here, can be borrowed, but many of the books mentioned here exist in only a handful of libraries in the United States, Canada and Britain, and those libraries will not loan out their copies.

So, with that in mind, here are some suggestions for either reading the original appearances of these characters and books or reading good critical descriptions of these characters and books.

- **Adventuresses:** There's been relatively little critical work done on the fictional Victorian adventuresses; most of what has been written has been about female Victorian detectives. Michele Slung's *Crime On Her Mind* (1976) and Colleen Barnett's *Mystery Women* (1997) are good critical looks at female Victorian detectives, as is Chris Willis' "The Female Sherlock," at <http://www.chriswillis.freemove.co.uk/femsherlock.htm>
- **Aliens:** There has been no good anthology devoted to Victorian alien stories, but Wells' *War of the Worlds* is easily found, and the 1971 English translation of Lasswitz's *Between Two Planets* is in several hundred libraries around the United States. The other books mentioned are not easily located, but there are any number of anthologies which contain Victorian alien stories.
- **Anarchists:** There has been no book-length examination of the figure of the anarchist in Victorian fiction, but Haia Shpayer-Makov wrote an excellent essay on the subject, "A Traitor to His Class," which appeared in *The Journal of European Studies* v26 n3 Sept. 1996.

Edisonades: There has been no book-length examination of the figure of the Edisonade in Victorian fiction. The two best sources of information on the Edisonade, besides the original texts, are the Edisonade entry in the Clute/Nichols *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1993) and my "Edisonade" and "Frank Reade" entries in the *British Story Paper Encyclopedia* (2002).

- **Future War:** The seminal Future War text was George Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking*, which is e-texted at <http://www.blackmask.com/books63c/dorkingdex.htm>. In 1999 George Locke published an eight-volume set entitled *Sources of Science Fiction: Future War Novels of the 1890s*. These books should be easily found for you via your local public library's Interlibrary Loan service.
- **Great Detectives:** Several anthologies of Victorian detective fiction were published in the past decade. A few good ones are *Victorian Tales of Mystery and Detection* (Michael Cox, ed., 1992), *The Mammoth Book of Golden Age Detective Stories* (Marie Smith, ed., 1994), and *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* (Alan Russell, ed., 1978).
- **Human Monsters:** Although there's been no book-length critical examination of the novels mentioned in this section, several of them have been reprinted in the past thirty years, including Cobben's *Master of His Fate*, Marsh's *The Beetle*, and Boothby's *Pharos the Egyptian*; the latter can also be found online at <http://www.blackmask.com/books47c/pharaos.htm>
- **Human-Made Monsters:** The most famous HMM novels, Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, are both easily found.
- **Yellow Perils:** Apart from the original texts, the single best examination of this stereotype and its use in fiction can be found in William Wu's *The Yellow Peril* (1979).

Finally, my Fantastic Victoriana site, at <http://www.geocities.com/jessnevins/vicintro.html>, has a great deal of information on all the characters and books mentioned here.

When, Where, and How Much?

Early Scientific Instruments

by Matt Riggsby

One of the obstacles to early scientific advancement was a lack of accurate measurements. Without good measuring tools, an observer could neither compare current circumstances to previous ones nor communicate his findings to others. Through careful craftsmanship and solid knowledge of simple geometry, a number of tools were developed to measure physical phenomena. Some, such as measuring sticks and liquid levels, are sufficiently simple as to not require comment, but others were more complex and less obvious. This article discusses the design, use, and significance of some of those early instruments, particularly those useful to navigation and astronomy.

Altitude Measurement

One fundamental task in early navigation was finding latitude (measuring longitude without landmarks was impossible before the 1800s). This was typically done by measuring the altitude of a celestial object, such as the sun or the star Polaris. The angle from the horizon to the object could be used to determine how far north or south the observer was. If travelers knew the relative positions of their journey's start and end points, they could travel north or south until they came to the right latitude, then turn east or west until they reached their destination.

One of the simplest tools for finding latitude is the latitude hook, a device used by the Polynesians. The latitude hook looks like an oversized sewing needle with a cross-bar near the point. At the beginning of a journey, the observer holds the hook at arm's length and views Polaris through the "eye." The cross-bar slides along the shaft to mark the horizon. During the journey, the observer makes observations with the hook at arm's length and the cross-bar at the horizon. If Polaris is above the eye, the observer is north of his original latitude; if it's below the eye, he's to the south. Obviously, the hook is of limited value. It can only be used at night and only indicates latitude relative to a starting point. It must also be held at exactly the same distance from the observer as it was when the cross-bar was set; essentially, only the original observer can continue to use it. However, it is trivially simple to build.

Arab sailors used a similar but more flexible tool, the kamal. A kamal has a perforated plate, each perforation labeled with a latitude, and a measured string. The card is held at the string's length away from the observer with the bottom at the horizon. Polaris is viewed through the perforations. The hole through which Polaris can be seen indicates the latitude. The measured string ensures that the card is held a consistent distance away from the observer, so it can be passed from person to person.

Eventually, more generic tools for measuring angular distance were developed, such as the cross staff. The cross staff is a long staff with a sliding cross-bar. The observer would hold the staff to his eye and sight along it, sliding the cross-bar until the ends appeared to touch two desired points, such as the sun and the horizon. A scale on the staff translated the cross-bar's distance along the staff into the angle between the points. Since the altitudes measured by nautical cross staffs fall within a narrow range for east-west voyages, cross staffs sometimes came with cross-pieces suited to their usual range of use. For example, Polaris would be closer to the horizon in the Mediterranean than in the Baltic Sea, so Mediterranean cross staffs had shorter cross-pieces than those farther north. Some cross staffs had multiple cross-bars, allowing their use in a range of latitudes. The cross staff also saw use as a surveying tool. If, for example, the observer found the angle between the base of a tower and its top and then measured the distance between his location and the base of the tower, the tower's height could easily be computed. Conversely, if an object's height and the current angle of elevation are known, distance can be computed.

Nautical cross staffs had a major drawback. Taking readings during the day required the observer to stare into the sun until he lined up the cross-bar with the horizon. To save observers' eyes, the back staff was created. Again, the observer sighted along a staff, but with his back to the sun. The far end of the staff had a viewing slit for precise

viewing of the target and, next to it, a small mirror. The mirror was at the pivot point of a long arm which extended back toward the user. The observer adjusted the arm, tilting the mirror, until the sun came into view. The other end of the arm had a pointer which traveled along a gauge indicating the arm's angle. With a little math, the observer could take the angle of the arm and determine the altitude of the sun. The sights could be protected by layers of smoked glass, further cutting down glare.

The most enduring altitude-measuring instrument, though, is the quadrant. The quadrant is the earliest of a family of pie-slice-shaped instruments, including quadrants, sextants, and octants, measuring angles up to a quarter, sixth, or an eighth of a circle, respectively. With the earliest quadrants, the observer would sight his target along one of the straight edges. A plumb bob hanging down from the point would indicate the angle of elevation. Like cross staffs, quadrants might require the user to stare into the sun, so a similar arrangement of mirrors and pivoting arms was eventually developed.

The face of the quadrant allowed craftsmen to provide useful geometric and mathematical charts, such as graphic representations of sines and cosines. One chart particularly well suited to the quadrant is the Nunes scale, which could be used to make guesses at longitude. The farther north the observer is, the shorter the distance is around the world at that line of latitude; therefore, a degree of longitude is shorter the farther north one goes. The Nunes scale gives the observer tools to easily compute how big a degree of longitude is at his latitude. The face of the quadrant is inscribed with arcs concentric to the curved edge. The arcs are marked with descending proportions (for example, 100%, 90%, 80% . . .). Crossing these arcs is a semi-circle from the zero-degree end of the bottom-most arc to the apex of the quadrant. Once the observer determines latitude, he can see where the semicircle and the line indicating latitude intersect. The location of that point along the scale of proportions can be used to determine what proportion of the maximum size of a degree of longitude (about 60 miles per degree at the equator) the observer is facing at his current latitude.

Naked eye observation can be remarkably accurate, but early instruments were plagued by obstacles to precise measurement. Two consistent issues were size and stability. In general, the larger the instrument, the more precise it could be. More space made it easier for craftsmen to mark more divisions, and the small margins of error were less significant. Tycho Brahe's consistently precise observations were made with the assistance of a huge quadrant built into the wall of his house. However, travelers couldn't carry architectural features with them, so they had to make do with smaller and therefore less accurate instruments. Mariners faced the additional problem of their ships rolling with the waves making accurate observations at sea difficult at best and nigh impossible in bad weather.

Timekeeping

The sundial was the earliest timepiece, and for a long time the most accurate. The principle is simple: a protruding object (a gnomon), carefully aligned with the nearer pole, casts a shadow on a marked surface. As the sun makes its way across the sky, the position of the shadow indicates the hour. However, there are subtleties to reading and setting up an extremely accurate sundial. Season and latitude effect the position of the shadow on the dial. One way of dealing with this problem was to mark the dial with a curving grid. The user could cross-reference latitude and date with the shadow's position to find local time. A different approach was to make an adjustable gnomon which could be moved to compensate for changes in the sun's path. Alignment with the pole and a level surface were also very important, so portable sundials might be fitted with a plumb bob or liquid level and, when the technology became available, a magnetic compass.

There were a number of alternative designs for sundials, going beyond the gnomon-and-flat-surface principle. For example, sundials could be vertical, with the gnomon protruding from a wall or column. Tiny sundials could be made from a ring or bracelet with a small hole in one side. The ring was held facing north, and a spot of light projected through the hole would fall on a mark on the inner surface indicating the time. It was even possible to build sundials with a sort of alarm. One design had a lens and miniature cannon. At noon, the lens focused the sunlight onto the touch-hole of the cannon, setting off a small charge. Theoretically, a carefully designed mechanism could allow the user to set a charge for any daylight hour.

A sundial could hardly show the wrong time, but its effective accuracy was limited by the precision of its markings,

which, like other instruments, is related to size. Typical sundials, about the size of a modern serving platter, could have an effective precision of fifteen minutes. Larger, permanent sundials could be even more precise. One enormous sundial in Jaipur, India, with a ten-story-tall gnomon, gives the time to within two *seconds*.

Sundials had a night-time counterpart, the nocturnal, which used the positions of stars to determine the hour of night. It consisted of two nested rotating dials with a small hole in the middle and two handles. The user would adjust one dial to the date, hold the instrument by one handle, and peer through the hole in the middle at Polaris, which aligned the instrument with north. The second handle was adjusted to align with a specific star (a nocturnal would be built to take readings from one or at most two stars; if those stars weren't visible, it wouldn't work). The combination of date and stellar position gave the time of night.

Complex Instruments

Most of instruments had a single purpose, but some could be put to multiple uses. The astrolabe, used since late antiquity, is among the most elegant of early astronomical instruments. An astrolabe consists of a number of rotating elements stacked on top of one another. On top is an open scrollwork disk, the rete. The ornate scrollwork is functional as well as artistic; points on it mark the positions of stars. Beneath the rete is a solid plate, the tympanum, marked with curving lines indicating stellar altitude and azimuth (angle east or west) and the position of the horizon. Because the precise arc of stars through the sky varies with latitude, an astrolabe usually came with several tympana, each for a different latitude. The tympanum itself sat on another solid plate, the mater, which was marked around the edges with degrees or hours of the day. Astrolabes were also fitted with a rotating sighting device, the alidade. The mater had a ring to be suspended by, and the back was usually inscribed with timekeeping scales and references for solving geometry problems, as with the quadrant.

An astrolabe could be used for several things. It could measure altitudes like a quadrant, and placed horizontally, it could be used to determine an object's azimuth. If you could find the sun's azimuth at dawn or sunset, the scales on the back would allow you to determine the date (Muslim astrolabes took it further, providing aids to determine timing of prayers). The rete side provided a general astronomy aid. Because stars on the rete have a fixed position relative to one another, the user could turn the rete to any one star's current position in the sky and immediately know where to look for the other stars or determine the time. He could also work backwards and forwards, turning the rete to other hours of the night and determine when any star would go above or below the horizon.

Another complex instrument is the armillary sphere, a three-dimensional representation of the Earth and the stars around it. Most armillary spheres have two fixed parts: one horizontal ring for the horizon and one vertical ring for a north-south meridian. Within these rings are a series of other rings or spherical cages representing the stars, the ecliptic, even the sun, moon, and planets. At the center is a small sphere representing the Earth (in elaborate versions, this may be a fully illustrated globe). The various parts could be turned and tilted to model the relative positions of Earth and stars at various times. Some armillary spheres could be used as observation aids, but most were used for educational and predictive purposes. A student could use an armillary sphere to examine why different stars were visible at different times of the year, while a trained astronomer could use it to determine when particular stars would rise or which star was ascendant at a particular time.

Optics

The ability of glass and crystals to manipulate light was known in antiquity, if little used. Water-filled glass lenses were used by the Romans to light small fires by focusing sunlight, and fortuitously-shaped natural crystals were occasionally used for magnification. However, the direct manipulation of light remained mostly theoretical until 13th century glassblowers developed the ability to grind convex lenses. These lenses were quickly pressed into service as magnifying glasses and spectacles. Concave lenses appeared a century later, so both nearsightedness and farsightedness could be corrected.

The first telescopes, made in the early 17th century, were refractors, simple tubes with two to four lenses. They started with about 3× magnification, and early experimenters quickly achieved magnifications of up to 20×, but higher

magnifications posed large problems. Lens technology was in its infancy, so irregularities in thicker, more powerful lenses caused distortions, and even the best-made lenses caused chromatic aberrations, smearing the image with rainbow-colored edges. While small (four to six feet long) telescopes were suitable for navigation and surveying, astronomical telescopes employing thin lenses and enormous focal lengths became huge. The largest telescopes, at up to 140 feet long, were too large for a tube. Instead, one lens was suspended high in the air, and the observer on the ground would have to sight along a series of guides with an eyepiece. Scholars postulated reflector telescopes, but difficulties in producing them kept them from appearing in significant numbers for over a century.

Compound (multiple-lens) microscopes appeared at the same time as telescopes and offered similar magnifications. Alas, they were even more problematic than early telescopes and remained curiosities. Ironically, simple (single-lens) microscopes with carefully made lenses, which appeared a century later, offered higher magnifications and less distortion until the dawn of the industrial revolution.

Instruments in Society and Campaigns

In addition to their practical uses, most of these instruments were symbolic of learning. To some extent, perhaps because most were expensive, they could be indicative of wealth and status. However, less expensive versions of many instruments were available in wood or even paper instead of metal. An educated man might have a paper astrolabe or a wooden quadrant. A rich man would have a deeply engraved brass armillary sphere with the brightest stars picked out in silver, probably in the corner gathering dust.

All of these instruments are natural candidates for magical uses and enchantment. The major purpose to which these tools were put, besides navigation, was astrology. Horoscopes and celestial portents were important business across the ancient world and might figure into social movements and governmental policy decisions. Astrologers spent many nights peering at the stars over their quadrants and astrolabes, picking out important conjunctions on their armillary spheres, and it seems fitting that magic-using characters would, too. Magicians casting predictive or sensory spells might use scientific instruments as part of the process; to the outside observer, their "spell casting" might look like astronomical research. Instruments in a fantasy campaign might contain pointers to heavenly bodies which cannot be seen, but are vital for taking truly accurate horoscopes (unimaginably hideous black stars and the mind-shattering constellations they form seem appropriate to a *Call of Cthulhu* campaign). Astronomical equipment might also be directly enchanted to ensure better observations or give the user extra abilities. On the other hand, in some campaigns, possession of such instruments might be taken as evidence of witchcraft or at least require a license.

Adventure Seeds

- **The Stars Themselves:** Rumor has reached the heroes of a fabulous armillary sphere. The silver armature is decorated with gems for stars, and the globe at the center is constructed of lapis, ivory, and malachite. More unusually (and more importantly), the stars aren't fixed. Rather, they can be moved from their regular positions along a network of fine wires. It is suggested rather than being a representation of the universe, this armillary sphere is the true reality, of which the visible world is merely a reflection. If this is true, manipulating the astrolabe would change the heavens, altering fortunes and destinies universally. The PCs may join the hunt for the sphere, but they'll have a lot of competition. And if they find it, will they attempt to tamper with the stars?
- **The Case of the Inaccurate Astrolabe:** Abu Fazul, a wealthy mystic, has died, and his possessions have been divided among his feuding relatives. A PC buys a fine astrolabe from one of them for a remarkably good price and quickly discovers why: the astrolabe is inaccurate, showing stars in the wrong positions or figuring wrong dates. This seems strange, since Abu Fazul oversaw its production. On closer examination, one of the decorative inscriptions announces that, reunited with its brothers, it will show the way to a great treasure. The PCs will have to track down the remaining members of the set without alerting Abu Fazul's contentious relatives and solve the riddle of the astrolabes, each of which is inaccurate in a different way, to build a map to the treasure.

Further Reading

- Stephenson, Bruce, Bolt, Martin and Friedman, Anna Felicity: *The Universe Unveiled*, Cambridge University Press.
- Fisher, Dennis: *Latitude Hooks and Azimuth Rings*, International Marine.

Shadow Steeds

by Elizabeth McCoy

A shadow steed looks roughly like a black horse (or other dominant riding beast), save that it has six legs -- the usual four in the usual places, and the extra two at the front and rear midline. Fortunately, considering this arrangement, they have no apparent gender. (Neither have they ever been observed in any actions that suggest courtship or mating; no one is quite sure where shadow steeds come from . . .)

Shadow steeds do not need to eat or drink, but they will if suitable food and water are available, and seem to enjoy this. Likewise, extremes of heat and cold do not harm them, but they act more comfortable in reasonable conditions. They probably need to breathe, as none have been seen underwater without riders (either both holding their breath, or both protected by magic or high-tech breathing spells/apparatus). They can be killed with mundane weapons, however.

The six legs of a shadow steed are amazingly limber; a shadow steed could play *Twister* and its back would remain perfectly level. They are -- despite being a little wider than a normal horse -- comfortable to ride, with no uncomfortable gaits. Indeed, in full gallop, shadow steeds can manage around fifty miles per hour! Furthermore, they can maintain this speed for hours, and require only minimal rest before starting up again. The rider is more likely to want more time to rest than the steed. Alas, they can carry only as much as an equivalent horse could -- though they, like mules, are inclined to simply not move when overloaded, rather than falling over from the exertion of trying.

However, a shadow steed can only touch that which is shadowed. They're not bothered by sunlight on them -- but they are damaged if they set hoof to a patch of ground which is not in shadow, or attempt to eat or drink something which does not have a shadow over it. Neither are they shy about expressing their pain, letting their rider know about it with a shrill scream. Their own shadow -- and that of anyone riding them or anything they carry -- is paler than it "should" be, and does not protect them. More than the briefest contact with unshadowed ground will cause smoke to come from the steed, and the affected part shows burn-marks. A dead shadow steed will decay normally -- unless the ground it lies on becomes unshadowed, in which case it will burn up with a smell of roasting horse.

Wild herds of shadow steeds can be found wherever they have shelter from the sun, and some vestiges of grazing. (Some shadow steeds have been seen eating dead animals, but never actually hunting them.) They can be captured and trained, like wild horses, or a solitary human can attempt to entice a single steed . . .

The requirements to catch a *personal* mount are up to the GM. At a minimum, it should require several days spent drifting within the herd, being accepted, and a reaction roll (or the like) from the prospective mount. Blood sacrifice or semi-vampiric symbiosis is optional. A personal mount will always be of the right size for its rider; the only time that foal-sized steeds have been seen is with child riders (who generally claim that they didn't see any foals until theirs showed itself to them). These shadow foals grow with their human. A personal mount will always live as long as its rider; a rider who dies of old age instead of violence will shortly be followed by the steed.

Abused shadow steeds will go feral at the first opportunity, as will a personal mount whose rider has died. Bridles and saddles will be shed quickly (and somewhat mysteriously), brands and scars eventually heal, and soon the steed is anonymous again. (Either that, or it vanishes utterly; who can know?)

A steed's personality is a mirror of the way its rider treats it; one which is ignored becomes placid and uncurious, while one which is petted and cared for will be friendly and helpful, and one which is beaten will become vicious. If someone rents out a shadow steed from a stable, the steeds come back with echoes of how they were treated that day. Aside from that, they are no more (or less) intelligent than an equivalent horse.

Mechanics: Shadow steeds use the same statistics as a normal mount of their type (riding horse, by default), save that they require only a half-hour of rest every 6-8 hours, and can reach high speeds on flat, level, appropriately-shadowed roads or plains. They *must* walk upon shadows -- sun-dappled roads are fine, so long as they can reach a shadow with every hoof-beat. Full moonlight or firelight does not damage them, but they still prefer to walk in the shadows cast by

such lights. If the ambient light is causing no vision penalties, it is bright enough to harm a shadow steed who steps in it, or tries to eat or drink something in the light. (New Shadow Steed riders are often reluctant to ride them save at night, while experienced ones realize that *any* overcast day is suitable; if they can't see their own shadow, it's shady enough.)

A shadow steed should make a dexterity (or equivalent) roll every hour of travel, with appropriate modifiers for terrain (wooded or clear-cut), to see if it misses a shadow and is damaged. (A critical success could mean no more rolls need be made for the duration of the trip; a critical failure probably means the mount is crippled and can only limp slowly about.) Damage might be a single hit, or a roll of the dominant die of the game system (1d6, 1d20, 1d10) . . . Naturally, it is often safer to travel at night; shadow steeds have excellent night vision . . .

Naturally, the origins and nature of shadow steeds is likely to be important to characters. If they are malevolent spirits in physical form, for instance, riding one is likely to be hazardous to one's soul -- or at least body. Openly demonic steeds may require a blood pact to own, damning their riders. On the other hand, if they are manifestations of benevolent ancestral spirits, *not* having one could be a sign of moral decay! (Shadow steeds who have such origins are more likely to have individual personalities than the default version described above. Great-grandmother Aedna may be a match-maker, and nudge her rider toward any attractive prospective spouse in the vicinity, while Uncle Jorge would prefer his rider not have any relationships beyond the Platonic or the married.) The ultimate nature of shadow steeds -- malevolent, benevolent, or neutrally supernatural -- is up to the GM to decide. (And it would surely be evil to have all three types co-exist . . .)

- **Horse Thief?:** The player characters are hired (or otherwise persuaded) to go after a stolen "horse" of "great value." This may be a simple search and retrieval mission, only complicated by the shadow steed's nature and needs. On the other hand, it could be a tangled web of deceit and angst, if the owner of the shadow steed had merely captured and trained the creature (possibly by abusive ways) and it was "stolen" by a poor-but-likable person who actually achieved the mystic bond of a *personal* mount. (It gets even more complex if the steed was still in the merchant caravan, being delivered to person A, stolen by group B, and then freed and bonded to by person C who might or might not have been part of group B . . .)
- **Haunting:** When the group is traveling, one of the PCs is on night watch and gets the urge to go investigate some noise or shadow. After being awakened back at the camp, the vaguely remembered incident seems but a dream of night-black horses -- but now the group is being followed. Is it merely a case of a shadow steed bonding with the character, or does it have more sinister designs on the PC? Or is it the key to some prophecy of saviors on divine horses of shadow?
- **Horse Thieves, v. 2:** In the winter, a group of barbarians are attacking the town where the player characters live (or just happen to be passing through), riding upon strange, magical beasts that do not tire. This unfair advantage has allowed the enemy to lay siege to the town, so even during sunny days, the townspeople can't get into break the blockade. The PCs are detailed to raid the barbarians' camp and steal the animals who are giving the enemy their better mobility and endurance. (Will they try to use the shadow steeds against the besiegers? Will the steeds cooperate?)

All the Pretty Horses

For those of you looking for the stats for normal horses, here they are in various game systems.

- **GURPS: Basic Set** p. 144 or **Bestiary 3rd Edition** p. 40-41.
- **Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition: Player's Handbook** p. 143-144, **Monster Manual** p. 196-197.
- **Vampire: The Dark Ages 2nd Edition:** p. 311.
- **Hero System 5th Edition:** p. 308.
- **Call of Cthulhu Edition 5.6:** p. 181.

Pyramid Pick

Unknown Armies, Second Edition

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Greg Stolze and John Tynes

Art by Samuel Araya, Paul Carrick, Moises Donoso Segundo, Felipe Echevarria, Earl Geier, Matt Harpold, Vance Kelly, Ann Koi, Thomas Manning, Tony Moseley, Rob Nemeth, Dan Parsons, Jim Pavelec, Brian Snoddy, Drew Tucker, Haroudo Xavier

336 page B&W hardcover; \$39.95

Now billed as "a roleplaying game of power and consequences," *Unknown Armies* takes as its central premise the "occult underground." In the peripheral vision of the normal world, people compete for occult power. From millionaires seeking transcendence to flesh magick adepts who lie rough on the streets to Avatars seeking to embody the archetypes of the human consciousness, those in the know exist in that hidden world. PCs may be members of the occult underground, its rulers, or ordinary people who find their lives affected by it. Whoever they may be, the occult underground is a part of their lives somehow.

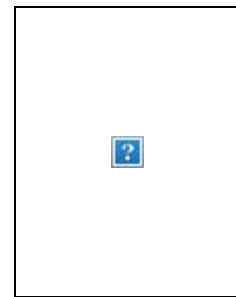
All *Unknown Armies* PCs have an obsession. In addition to being a plot hook, the obsession has a mechanical effect. The system is percentile-based, and when a roll is made using a skill directly associated with a character's obsession, the digits on the dice can be "flip-flopped." For example, a roll of 92 (almost certainly a failure) could be switched to 29 (almost certainly not).

Unknown Armies hovers somewhere in the middle of the spectrum in terms of rules complexity. With just four stats (Body, Speed, Mind, and Soul) and a do-it-yourself skill list, the core mechanic is simple enough. However, when the powers and effects of Avatars and adepts are added to the mix, things can get complicated, especially for the GM.

Another mechanic worthy of mention is the "Madness Meter." Through actions and events, characters can be hardened or made more vulnerable to five types of madness: Violence, the Unnatural, Isolation, Helplessness, and Self. Every Madness check will have a psychological effect on the character, one way or another.

As fun and cool as it was, the [first edition](#) of *Unknown Armies* had some significant problems. A big stumbling block for a lot of potential players was a real lack of direction for characters . . . just what was one supposed to do in this setting? Another was more of a problem for the GM: How much should the players know about the setting?

The new edition fixes both these problems with aplomb. Dozens of campaign seeds are provided, categorizing different types of PC groups, from occult investigators to magickal cabals to crime-fighting valets. For the second problem, the whole book has undergone a massive reorganization. Now, information on the setting is provided at three levels: "Street" (the PCs are ordinary folk who stumble across the Occult Underground), "Global" (PCs are clued-in players on the occult scene) and "Cosmic" (PCs are able to change the universe). The GM decides at which level his campaign will be, and the players can then read the book up to the relevant section. Each of these sections clearly sets out a character's knowledge, with headings such as "What You Know" and "What You Hear" (the second is a collection of unsubstantiated rumors at each level).



The game is not for everyone, as *Unknown Armies* is very much character-driven. Due to the obsessed nature of the PCs, plots more often than not revolve around characters' desires. This is why a campaign concept needs to be agreed before play unlike, say, *Vampire: the Masquerade*, where all characters have at least something in common, *Unknown Armies* characters can be almost anything. Thus, characters must be designed to be compatible with one another. Gamers who like being given missions to carry out would be quite at home in, say, "The New Inquisition"-style game, where they act as occult hit squads, but they would probably be unhappy in a more free-form game.

The book has expanded considerably from the first edition. The main rulebook now includes rules (culled mainly from first edition sourcebooks) for car chases, riots, ascending as an archetype, and so forth. Some new mechanics are there, too. Proxy rituals have been altered so that they work better. The initiative rules are less clunky, while archetypes and magick schools have been expanded. A great new addition is paradigm skills. Representing a character's firmly-held worldview (e.g. Christian, Military, Scientific), a paradigm skill strengthens his resistance to one type of madness, while lowering resistance to another. As a way of representing belief, it knocks the socks off more primitive personality mechanics.

Some of the new content supersedes parts of the first edition sourcebooks. However, with the exception of proxy rituals, this is merely because the information has now been included in the main book, rather than because the actual rules have changed. A page at the back of the book explains which books have such content, and what it is.

The occult underground is much the same as it ever was; all your old favorites are here. *Unknown Armies* is resolutely metaplot-free. The only major alteration occurs in the True Order of Saint-Germain, who could not operate in the way they used to after the events of September 11th.

With new artwork and layout, the second edition is a very attractive book, though it sadly now lacks John Tynes' bizarre photographs. Some of the artwork is mediocre, but there are more than enough pieces of very high standard that are good to look at and more importantly evoke the setting and mood of the game.

So, to sum up, nothing has been taken away from *Unknown Armies 2nd Edition*, and a lot added. Two sample adventures are included, which demonstrate the game's possibilities. However, the most important addition is not based on the rules or setting, but on the advice for both GMs and players, making *Unknown Armies* much easier to "get" and to play.

And the title? It's a Yeats connection:

*The dew drops slowly and dreams gather: unknown spears
Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,
And the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears . . .*

--Tom McGrenery

Pyramid Review

QAGS RPG

Published by [Hex Entertainment](#)

Created by Steve Johnson, Leighton Connor, and Dale French

64-page b&w A5 saddle-stitched book; \$5.99

Galaxikhan Attacks!

Written by Colin Thomas, Kevin Butler, Leighton Connor, Jason Whisman, and Lionel Houde

Illustrated by Gary Bedell

32-page saddle stitched book; \$8.99

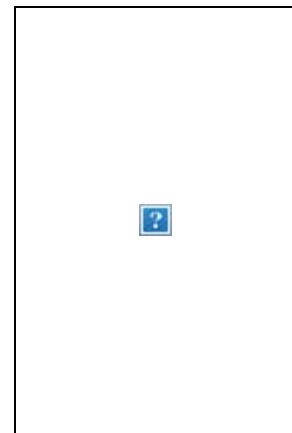
The writers of *QAGS* claim to be imprisoned in a bunker somewhere in deepest Kentucky and forced to do their master's bidding. They also claim that *QAGS* are "small furry carnivorous Antarctic mammals noted for their brightly colored pelts." Alternatively, *QAGS* are the "symptoms of a highly contagious form of ringworm." Pronounced "KWAGS," *QAGS* might also stand for "Quick-Ass Game System." None, all, or just one of the above might be true, but for the purposes of this review, let us assume that the latter definition is within hailing distance of the truth.

If that is the case, *QAGS* is designed as a light, simple game system, able to cover many different genres with almost no modifications. The inspiration for the game and its writing style is clearly the movies and pop culture, but with a kind of droll, knowing humor that comes across as HOL-lite (in fact the humor and the language are both quite strong, so *QAGS* more than deserves the "suggested for mature readers" label on the front cover).

The book itself reminds of a reasonably well-put together fanzine from the 1980s. It is easy to read, full of both bad student and bad gaming humor, with art to match. When the cover itself urges you to "BURN THIS GAME!" then it should give you some idea of the product you hold in your hands. Like other generic and universal RPGs, *QAGS* does come more or less complete with only a twenty and a six-sided die needed to play. Actually, you also need some Yum-Yums, but more on these later. The actual rulebook does not come with an adventure, but Hex does do a number of "QikPaks" or scenarios; but again, more on those later.

Character creation in *QAGS* is quick and easy. Once armed with a concept, players assign values and numbers to a number of key words that describe and quantify their characters. Sample concepts include Tex, a bisexual tough-as-leather gunslinger; Los Zapatos, Hispanic shoe salesman by day, crime fighter with shoes of power by night; Romeo, as in Romeo and Juliet; Joe, martial artist and last master of the Way of the Chipmunk; and the post apocalyptic warrior, Yum-Yum Girl, and her teddy bear, Mister Pookums.

The words include a character's name, plus their body, brain and nerve attributes. Then their job -- Kung Fu master, stockbroker, projectionist, games reviewer; a gimmick such as vampire -- classic or contemporary, magi, the ability to fly, tech freak or dragon slayer; and a weakness which usually corresponds to their gimmick. Thus the vampire



gimmick also has vampire as their weakness, while a dragon slayer might have code of honor or dragon magnet and a tech freak would have Big Dork or Bad Personal Hygiene -- if not both!

Body, brain, and nerve are each determined by a roll of 1d6 + 10, Job by a roll of 1d20 and the GM sets the value for both the Gimmick and the Weakness. They will have the same value. Alternatively forty points can be split between these words, which are modified by a roll of the six-sided die each. Finally a player assigns a suitable quote for their character's tag line and a suitable actor or actress for the final word, WWP/PH/HITM, or "Who would play him/her in the movie?" The rules suggest Val Kilmer, Molly Ringwald, or Prince depending on the character's gender.

To do anything, a twenty-sided die is rolled against a pertinent word, body, brain, nerve, job, gimmick or weakness. If none of them is really appropriate, then the nearest is chosen and its value halved before rolling. If the role is under the number then you are successful, but the higher the roll that is still under the word value, the better the actual success. Combat runs in an equally simple and fast way with damage being determined by how much better an attack roll is better than an opponent's dodge roll. Armor and weapons modify the result just ever so slightly, as *QAGS* is a very light generic RPG.

A wild card to the rules and die rolls are *QAGS'* Yum-Yums. What are Yum-Yums? Literally they are the hero or luck points of other RPGs, given an actual physical form. Instead of the aforementioned hero or luck points, players begin each game with one to six pieces of small candy. You can use brands such as M&Ms or Smarties, or instead of these of tasty treats you could use glass beads as you might when playing a CCG. (Despite being much prettier and crunchier, they are flavorless and detrimental to your health.) Yum-Yums can of course be eaten, but then they are gone and serve no other purpose in *QAGS*. Alternatively they can be spent to succeed automatically in a roll, counter a weakness, or saved to improve a character. They can be earned by good roleplaying, successfully completing an adventure, bribing the GM with food and drink, or by doing their laundry or making the players laugh. More are gained if that amusing thing causes liquid to shoot out of another player's nose!

The GM's section can best be described as a lightweight mixture of decent advice and trivialities. For example, the first of the two solo adventures can be played through in twenty seconds, while the second will probably last only three times as long. That aside, for a game as shallow as *QAGS*, the advice is perfectly suited.

"Quick" and "Ass" sum up *QAGS* to a tee -- the former for its speed and ease of use, and the latter for its tone. Some may avoid this game for that reason, but really you should push the student humor aside and allow yourselves to get on and play the game. That's the point of *QAGS*.

* * *

Should the potential *QAGS* GM want more, then Hex Entertainment publish a number of QikPaks, as they call their adventures. The first and second of these, *Paradise and Mars* and *Venus at War* follow the same format as the rulebook. The latest does not, and is not just a big step up in terms of production values and compared with the *QAGS* rulebook, but also in terms of the maturity of the writing. Further, *Galaxikhan Attacks!* is the herald of a new line of books from Hex Entertainment that focus upon "M-Force" a privately funded organization that investigates and neutralizes the many monsters that threaten the security of 1950s America. Thus we are in B-Movie territory . . .

Galaxikhan Attacks! sports a slightly garish wraparound cover depicting a US Air Force jet bomber about to strike a gargantuan, horned-and-clawed green monster on the rampage in small town America. Though eye-catching, it does overawe the viewer, and a clearer picture can be found inside the frontispiece, though without the color. The internal layout is done using a large text size, and broken up by the excellent comic book style art of Gary Bedell. All that lets the appearance down are the maps, which appear to have been done in *Paintshop* or something similar.

The players take characters that are part of M-Force; *Galaxikhan Attacks!* classifies them as scientists, tough guys, scholars of monster lore, and students, thus falling into the archetypes of the genre. Examples of these four types are provided, although in some cases, the "Who Would Play Him/Her In The Movie" word for each of them is rather too modern for the 1950s. By using these examples, players should just as easily be able to create their own characters.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

In *Galaxikhan Attacks!*, a strange creature has been seen attacking the livestock of a Californian town. M-Force rushes to deal with it, but finds that it is now attacking the town! Once they have dealt with the strange new creature, the party tracks it back to the source: an alien capsule. Deciphering cryptic clues, they can learn that something far larger and more dangerous is on the loose!

Over the course of three acts, the members of M-force track this creature west to the final showdown in San Francisco. By that time, they should have discovered the nature of Galaxikhan and perhaps determined a method of dealing with it. One such solution may be to raise another monster from the depths of the sea! Thus *Galaxikhan Attacks!* is not just a B-Movie feature, but also a movie adventure that should appeal to the Godzilla fans as well.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Galaxikhan Attacks! provides new rules for *QAGS* on how to handle big monsters, but much of the new material for the M-Force setting will be detailed in greater depth in the forthcoming *M-Force RPG*. Until that arrives, *Galaxikhan Attacks!* should give a group a session or two of slightly tongue-in-cheek fun -- as befits the genre. Plus it also serves as the launching pad for a series of adventures: four possible sequels are discussed briefly. Of course, *QAGS* is not necessary to run *Galaxikhan Attacks!* as the rules and statistics are generic. Almost any game system could be used instead; this adventure is more than suited for use with *GURPS Atomic Horror*.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Silver Age Sentinels, Deluxe Limited Edition

Published by [Guardians of Order, Inc.](#)

Written by **Stephen Kenson, Mark C. MacKinnon, Jeff Mackintosh, Jesse Scoble**

Additional Writing by **David L. Pulver, Lucien Soulban**

Cover Artwork by **Bob McLeod (illustration), Liquid! (coloring)**

Interior Illustrations by **Storn Cook, Jeff Mackintosh, Ed Northcott, Chris Steward, Barry Winston**

336 pages, full-color hardbound; \$44.95

It's turning out to be quite a summer for superheroes. Not only is *Spider-Man* swinging pretty at the box office, there's a slew of super action in the works on the roleplaying front. *Godlike* and the new edition of *HERO* are already out, a new *Champions* volume is on the way, and Guardians of Order is muscling its way onto the scene with *Silver Age Sentinels Deluxe Limited Edition RPG* (a *d20* version and an unlimited edition are scheduled as well).

The setting is Empire City, a proud and bustling town rife with adventure and peopled in part by superheroes of many stripes. Empire City is actually New York City with a different name; most everything else is the same without even a change of serial numbers. It has the same boroughs, the same buildings, and a mayor named Giuliani (the timeline starts in 2001). It's also home to the world's premiere super team, the Guard, who make their home in the hollowed and renovated shell of the Empire State Building -- the old one was all but destroyed by an invasion from a parallel universe called Dark Empire.

Super beings are not limited to American shores, however . . . ever since the Frisco Flyer came swooping in on his flying apparatus to save dozens from the San Francisco Earthquake early last century, gadgeteers, pulp heroes, and metahumans have swept the planet and the popular imagination. The Ascension Institute has begun looking into the question of super beings, the government has its own cadre called The Order, and the son of a former supervillain has raised an entire island full of mysterious relics from the North Sea and established the independent sovereign country of Thule thereon.

Silver Age Sentinels uses the D10 *Tri-Stat System*, almost identical to the D6 Tri-Stat System in *Big Eyes, Small Mouth, Second Edition*. Three character Statistics -- Body, Mind, and Soul -- are purchased with Character Points, and all are equally important for character development. Body is your overall physicality, Mind covers your mental processes, and Soul is all things abstract or spiritual. Each is rated 1 to 20, though people tend to top out at 12. To keep every Body 8 character from performing like a pro wrestler, the Less Capable Defect (see below) can lower certain facets of any Statistic. You may have a physique like The Rock, but you may also dance like Orson Welles.

Character Points also get you Character Attributes, rated from 1 to 10 and priced according to how influential they are. Attributes include Characteristics (typically un-superpowered stuff like Henchmen and Wealth) and Powers (Reincarnation, Duplicate). Since it's a superhero game it mostly means wicked cool superpowers (*Big Eyes, Small*



Mouth has additional Character Attributes for more detail). The superpower list is pretty comprehensive, including everything from power blasts to teleportation, but if the power you want isn't spelled out you can widen your horizons with other options. Dynamic Powers and Power Flux are open-ended abilities that let you mimic nebulously defined or wide-ranging powers like magic or matter control. Power Modifier Values (PMVs) let you fine-tune abilities, extending the range or widening the area of effect. Special Attack alone is teeming with options, good and bad. Make your bullets zip around corners and home in on the target. Maybe you have to drop your force field to use your ability, or perhaps the force field itself will stun your opponents. Examples and design notes, woefully missing from some books, are in plentiful supply here.

Skills are purchased using a separate pool called, of course, Skill Points. They're ranked from 1 to 5 (unlike the 1 to 6 scale **Big Eyes, Small Mouth** offers), but aren't necessarily tied to one Stat. You'll probably add your Computers Skill Level to your Mind to see how well you operate computers, but the GM may have you add it to your Body to determine how quickly you can type in code, or your Soul to see how lucky you get when picking the right decryption software. The limited Statistics can thus be adjusted to a maximum number of situations.

If you haven't enough points, you can shuffle things around. Your power-light caped crusader may want skills galore; Character Points can become Skill Points by taking the Character Attribute Highly Trained. The reverse is also true; Unskilled is one of several Defects that takes away Skill Points and returns Character Points. Defects give you traditional comic-book limitations in exchange for Character Points. Maybe your powers activate at all the wrong times, or you're afraid of dogs, or you become weak in the presence of a magnetic field.

The **D10 System** uses that die instead of the d6s from **Big Eyes, Small Mouth**. To accomplish something, add your Skill Level, if any, to the Statistic to get the Check Value. If the GM believes the task is particularly easy or hard, he may add a Check Value Difficulty Modifier. Roll 2d10, add the results together, and compare them to the final Check Value. Results less than or equal to this number are successes, results over that number are failures. A 2 is always a success and a 20 is always a failure. The margin of success or failure can make the difference if you're trying to outdo someone in a race or other contested action, or if the GM needs a benchmark by which to measure your performance.

Combat also requires a roll against a Check Value, but you replace the Statistic with your Attack Value, the average of your three Statistics. You may still add any Skill Levels you have with that attack form -- Archery for using a bow and arrow, for example, or perhaps Special Ranged Attack if you shoot beams from your eyes. If you hit, the target rolls 2d10 against their Defensive Number (their Attack Value minus 2) to avoid the blow.

Damage represents another change from the original **Big Eyes, Small Mouth** rules -- to maintain the exchange of blows typical of superhero combat, you must roll randomly to determine the percentage of maximum damage your attack does (if you did it all at once, combat wouldn't go past the second pile driver). The optional critical damage tables that may boost your attack over even its Maximum Damage Value may vary this further.

There's a whole lot going on between the covers of **Silver Age Sentinels**, and the amazing thing is how well the entire thing is intertwined. Even with changes, the **Tri-Stat System** is straightforward but infinitely malleable, its many levels densely woven together. Guardians of Order has outdone themselves; not only is the artwork marvelous, with everything you could want in a comic book, it matches the material being discussed on that page, and the character pictured is often the one featured in any examples. No game has achieved this level of art-to-text harmony. The pieces are even unobtrusively captioned.

The original characters are featured in the mock comic covers that preface each chapter (some are homages to famous real covers, and these "covers" have bends and folds in them -- clearly not in mint condition), and the covers change their style oh-so-slightly as the book progresses, from the Golden Age style to the modern day. Some real covers can be found in the introduction, in which the reader gets an overview of funny-book history and discovers these people know what they're doing. More importantly, it establishes the book's purpose: to bring the bright and shiny world of silver-age books into present-day roleplaying games, a style the creators feel has been missing from many recent efforts.

The book is not without faults. It could use more organization -- some sections start and stop without clear demarcation. The font size changes too subtly, and headers seem nonexistent. The world overview is nicely designed

as a series of web pages, but it takes up space and the text gets crushed to painfully small proportions. The character sheet is neat and clean, but when compared to the long, cramped sample templates you have to wonder if everything will fit. Some powers -- notably Dynamic Powers and Power Flux -- not only need plenty of explanation, it's hard to tell the two apart. Legality probably prevented adding extensive, "Examples: Doctor Strange, Green Lantern" notes.

Nevertheless, the book strives to make clear every aspect of play, and almost always succeeds. The world of Empire City and the many plot hooks aren't exactly groundbreaking drama, but they're functional and fit the ambition to make a more hopeful playing field. There's a lot to be explored, plenty to get the GM started, and not a single brooding hero in sight (though you can play those, too). There are gaming industry in-jokes everywhere, and touches like the scaling rules (so you can play the Punisher and Captain America in the same fight) are priceless examples of an eye for detail.

Silver Age Sentinels Deluxe Limited Edition is a gorgeous full-color and hardbound volume. Guardians of Order is asking \$44.95 for it, and they're going to get it. With games like *Nobilis* and *Silver Age Sentinels* raising RPG design to an art form, the gallery is going to be adding a new wing. Grab your cape, cowl, and Captain Midnight decoder ring and join the fun -- it's worth the price of admission.

--Andy Vetromile

Teaming Up The Kryptonian With Mam-El

Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the column...

For those of you who are new to the *Pyramid* family, we're on part VII of our character power level series; nations have fallen, suns have died, and babies have been conceived and born since this series began. (Not the *same* babies, mind you . . . and none by me.)

Anyway, according to my chart, we're on the option about varying power levels. Now, I *know* that choice was meant at the time to appease folks who like playing different games, but that hasn't stopped me from wandering off on a tangent in the past.

So let's turn our choice on its side a smidge: What about playing different power levels in the same game?

It's not uncommon at all, at least in fiction; Robin teams up with Superman, Obi Wan works with Luke, and Doctor Who takes on a British cavewoman as a companion. What makes these folks work well together?

Well, to be honest, scriptwriters, really.

I mean, if you're a scriptwriter and you notice that Robin hasn't gotten any significant "screen time" (however it's defined in the medium) in the past 10 minutes, then it's easy to whip up a scene that highlights his abilities. If you intend Robin to use his remarkable deductive abilities to determine which person in the room is carrying a concealed bomb, you don't need to worry about Superman's player saying, "Don't bother, and step aside! That's why I have X-Ray Vision!"

But just because no GM plot has ever survived contact with players doesn't mean you need the awesome powers and respect associated with your typical Hollywood screenwriter. No, with some careful planning and thought, characters of different powers should be able to interact on the same team, without fear that one player will hog all the spotlight.

In fact, some games do this already, to varying degrees. In first and second editions of the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, for example, the base assumption was that characters like Fighters would be stronger than Magic-Users in the beginning of their careers, yet would be eclipsed by the Magic-User at later levels. Thus those early levels were generally akin to the Adventures of Captain Effective and One-Trick Target. (I'm not sure if they've changed things in *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*.) The *Marvel Super-Heroes* RPG from the 1980s had random character creation; you could create a "Normal Human", you could make a "Deity." And in the various incarnations of the *Doctor Who*, there are suggestions or even presumptions that one player would play a Time Lord, and the rest of the group would play his companions. And some games, like *Aberrant*, make no bones about telling folks that, yes, some powers are more powerful and point-effective than others.

This issue has been dealt with in the past; *Dragon* #132 had an article about starting characters off with different Hero Point levels in *DC Heroes* depending on their origins, for example, that's stuck with me all these years. But these usually deal with the mechanics of making some characters more powerful than

How powerful do you like your characters to be in RPGs you play in, compared to the rest of the populace?	
Gods among men! I like really powerful characters. (Four-Colored Supers, High Magic, <i>In Nomine</i>)	2%
Powerful! I like characters with abilities far different from normal people. (<i>Vampire</i> , <i>Mage</i> , Jedi)	8%
Highly competent! I like characters that are still human, but incredibly skilled. (Batman, James Bond, <i>Black Ops</i>)	13%
Competent! I like characters that are human, but still more skilled than normal folks. (<i>X-Files</i> , <i>Dungeons & Dragons</i> , <i>Call of Cthulhu</i>)	33%
Normal! I like my characters human. (some <i>Traveller</i> games)	4%
Men among gods! I like playing weak characters among very strong forces. (<i>Bunnies & Burrows</i>)	0%
It depends. I like playing lots of different power levels.	36%
Dude! I don't roleplay!	0%

Bonus Pointless Anecdote!

In the *Comic Buyers Guide* there was a game proposed one time (I believe by Mark Evanier, but it might have been Tony Isabella) at the height of the company crossover madness, when one-shot comics like *Batman/Predator*, *Star Trek/X-Men*, and even *Punisher/Archie* were common.

Anyway, the game was to figure out what was the most

others; really, that's the least of the problems . . . simply give one of a group of identical characters a Sword of Salsafying, and you've suddenly made one of them more powerful. But how do you deal with a party specifically designed to be comprised of folks with varying power, or how do you play in such a campaign?

Well, it's not as difficult as you may believe. Here is yet another in a series of omnipresent Random Thought Table lists.

Pick your players wisely. While arguably good advice for any game, it's perhaps more so when mixing power levels; it's a fairly advanced technique, and one player with a wildly incompatible gaming style and the wrong character can either affect everyone else's enjoyment, or simply have a miserable time. If there *is* going to be a Most Powerful Character, you have two philosophical choices: Give it to the Best/Most Experienced Player, with the understanding that he'll have the responsibility to use it wisely, or give it to the Worst/Least Experienced Player, who may not be able to use it as creatively/devastatingly as a better player. Yes, these two choices are contradictory; that's life, sometimes. Go with your gut, or flip a coin.

Form your group wisely. Again, this is good advice for most games, but in a mixed power level game it's quite possibly more important. Why do the group of heroes get together, and why do they *stay* together? In any kind of tutor/student or master/companion situation, the arrangement is obvious (or at least the original basis for the arrangement); beyond that, it can take some effort to make the party work well together.

So let's build an example. In a modern high-pulp mystical game, there are four players. One of them, Rex Tavish -- aka The Crawler -- has the ability to enter the Shadowworld, interacting with the denizens there and appearing elsewhere, spanning great distances in the blink of an eye . . . at least, to an observer from the Physicaland; when he's not being a hero, he also deals with the pressures of a secret identity and the demands of a being a university archeological professor. (Rex represents the "Powerful!" template.)

Rex has been singled out by Equipoise, a remarkably powerful Incarnation of Balance who believes Rex has the potential to become one of the masters of the Shadowworld; he wants to cultivate this possibility, and keep him from falling into the clutches of the Forces of Law, which seek to dominate our realm. He also finds himself oddly fascinated by the world of mortals, which is vastly different than the time of the Black Death, when he last resided on the Physicaland. ("Gods among men!")

Meanwhile, Janet May, a reporter who covered the Bosnia operation, is friends with Rex, and just happens to be investigating the career -- and secret identity -- of The Crawler. ("Competent!") Finally, Janet has a hamster named Nibbles that is -- unknown to all -- actually the reincarnation of Hoang Man Kin, who was imprisoned in his rodently body by the Forces of Law to atone for a wicked previous life. He has a habit of just "happening" to escape at the same time Janet goes on one of her adventures; unfortunately, his mastery of martial arts does him little good in his present three-ounce body. ("Men among gods!", with a potential to become "Highly competent!")

Even though the power levels are wildly different, all the characters have a

outrageous supported crossover chain you could create; in other words, if Character A has met Character B, and Character B has met Character C, then you could say that Character A could (theoretically) meet with Character C.

It's a fun little game, and an interesting way to waste time, all the while exercising those Geek Trivia brain cells.

Anyway, here's the best I've come up with.

- Begin with The Endless (from Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* comic series).
- Dream (aka The Sandman) from The Endless has met John Constantine (from the comic *Hellblazer*).
- John Constantine has interacted with Swamp Thing.
- Swamp Thing has met Batman.
- Batman and Robin teamed up with Scooby-Doo and his friends (in the 1970s "New Scooby-Doo Movies" series)
- Scooby-Doo and friends have also met with the Harlem Globetrotters on that same series.

Thus we have the end result of "The Endless meets the Harlem Globetrotters." The plot writes itself, and no doubt culminates with a basketball game to determine the fate of the Dreaming.

(Alternatively, you can add the observation that the Harlem Globetrotters have been on Gilligan's Island, and thus team up the Endless with *Gilligan's Island*. I don't think it's as amusing, but it *does* have nice

reason to form a nucleus for adventuring purposes; there are also enough plot threads tying them together to ensure a fair number of adventures, without needing any bigger conceit than the ones inherit in their origins.

Remember your themes. Why have we spent the past six weeks going over the differences between all the power levels (outside of the fact that we're out of all other ideas and it seems a good way to fill up weeks)? To give you the building blocks necessary to make those kinds of characters *work*; interestingly, for the most part the elements presented don't work at cross-purposes, and are compatible.

Thus Equipoise generally faces equal opposition (other Incarnations), and has the Psychological limitation that he can only act to restore balance (thus meaning he will generally be reactive); most of his focus will be centered around what it is to be a god, centered around a sense of (re)discovery and interaction with humanity (aka the other PCs). Rex Tavish finds himself struggling with new-found powers that seek to define him, in a world that would not understand his abilities (since they reference a realm they cannot comprehend, and are pretty darn creepy to boot). He also finds it difficult to stay connected with humanity, and is often tempted to use his abilities for trivial purposes (like teleporting across town when he's late).

"Nibbles" finds himself living in the confusing world of being a pet; although he has a human intellect, he has little way to express it (no one has figured out yet that his random scratches are, in fact, Chinese characters). He finds himself facing great challenges in his daily life, like fighting rats as he explores and tries to help the party, keeping from being crushed as those humans invariably get involved in combat, and escaping that damn cage *again*.

Janet finds herself the nexus of this odd world; although her job provides amazing flexibility, she finds herself stymied by her inability to discover more details about The Crawler; fortunately she gets more than enough interesting stories with her involvement with the group. She also tends to be the voice of human reason; she's the one who is most able to interact with "normal" people, and the one most likely to point out to the others that *some* of us need to get a normal amount of sleep so we can get to work in the morning. (And if she could only somehow keep that darn hamster from escaping . . .)

Presuming that all the players -- and the GM -- keep their respective themes and ideals in mind, the existence of variable power levels in a group should enhance that distinction for everyone, making *all* the characters more special.

Finally, make sure everyone gets their time in the spotlight. This is difficult, and probably warrants its own column. Fortunately, with the various themes that a different-power-level game has, it's a fair bit easier; simply pick a character point that only relates to that character. A necessary keycard falls into a sewer grate; this is part of the natural order, and thus in balance (Nibbles to the rescue!). The spirits of the Shadowworld demand arbitration in a dispute, and summon an impartial observer . . . perhaps in the middle of an archeology lecture. The Incarnation of Chaos has blocked all notions of Law from the minds of men, forcing Equipoise to intervene as the rest of the party deals with a world in the throes of anarchy. A rival newspaper offers Janet an editorship, promising much more money and prestige, but relegating her to a desk job if she accepts. And so on. Just remember that if the players *do* manage to thwart the planned course of action ("Equipoise must restore balance to the world; Janet shall be an editor *and* still be an investigative journalist!"), don't punish them for it. If the situation is wildly inappropriate, talk to the player(s) afterwards and mention your concerns. And, of course, as a player you should always be aware of those situations that *are* particularly applicable to your character, and pounce on them.

If the players are up for it, a mixed-power-level campaign can be a wild ride, and provide ample opportunities for each character type to revel in their differences . . . all the while restoring balance to hamsters the world over.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: At Your Service, p. 42.

cross symmetry of seven characters on both sides. Gilligan as Destruction, perhaps?)

For the two people who are now mildly amused, you're welcome. If you're good (or bad) I may tell you how *I Love Lucy* can meet *Aliens*. Or how the *Smurfs* can meet the *X-Files*. The Smurf is Out There.

(Three stars) **"YEAH, I KNOW IT BLOWS HOLES IN THINGS BACK HOME, BUT WILL IT WORK OVER HERE?"**

Pick up a .38 revolver on Earth, or a Wand of Ignition over in Gazreal, and they'll work just fine. Try firing the gun at a charging dragon on Gazreal, or triggering the wand's spell at an on-coming truck on Shadow Earth, and, in either case, you might as well be holding sticks. Nothing is going to happen."

Reign of Fire

A *GURPS Cabal/Reign of Steel* Crossover

by Werner H. Hartmann

"I never thought I would say this: but I would die and kill for just a few billions more humans on the planet!"
-- Julius Vandenberg, Vampire and Adept, 2047, somewhere in California.

In this scenario, the 18 demi-gods who drove the human race to near-extinction and divided the planet among them into 18 zones were no AIs -- they are dragons. And their minions are not robots; they're zombies, werewolves, and elementals. Due to experiments of certain cabalists, magic and dragons returned in full force unto the face of the Earth -- and neither mankind nor the Cabal could handle it. This is a world of post-apocalyptic horror, where dragons roam the skies, zombies stalk the ruined cities, witches are burned at the stake, and where a secret brotherhood of monsters may be mankind's last best hope for survival.

Welcome to the Reign of Fire.

History Up To 2047

The last dragon to roam the material plane died in 1531. This fact is common knowledge to any decent cabalist at the beginning of the third millennium. The same fact made genuine dragon's blood a rare, expensive, and *limited* resource for practitioners of magic -- and while there always had been some eccentric cabalists advocating a common effort to *return* dragons to Assiah, they were usually ignored.

Things changed when the researchers of Aeon Laboratories told Grand Master Albert Garner Kavanagh III that they had discovered a formula which would actually allow him to *grow himself a new body* from his head. Kavanagh was sceptical at first, but after carefully checking the results of his scientists he became a fanatic believer. All that was needed now was the condensed essence of a few thousand gallons of dragon's blood of the finest quality. So, knowing that the majority of the Cabal would be less than ecstatic about this endeavor, Kavanagh started a secret campaign of re-naturalization of the great dragons on Earth by any means necessary -- be it genetic engineering, alchemical transmutation, or transdimensional egg-napping. He even found some allies in his cause, mostly members of the fae and certain shapeshifters. It is unknown, if any other Grand Masters joined the effort, but Athene du Sarrazin, Koschei, Garravin, and Erszbet Bathory are among the usual suspects.

The year 2026 saw the hatching of the first real dragon in a secret alchemical research facility of Aeon Labs somewhere in Alaska. Those first dragons were small and not very intelligent (use stats for dragons in *GURPS Technomancer*), but their genetic material was transported to laboratories all over the globe, where all kinds of magical experiments were undertaken to enhance growth, intelligence, and inherent magical ability of the next generations of dragons, so that *their* blood would meet all of Kavanagh's requirements. They succeeded.

In 2031 in a large alchemical research center on the Philippines, exactly 500 years after the death of the last dragon on Earth, *something* happened during the "birth" of the first "Tiamat" model: the enormous beast, which stepped fully-grown (or so the researchers thought) from a revolutionary alchemically modified fusion reactor, and which could channel energies directly to and from Briah, was obviously the real thing. The dragon proved to be extremely loyal and powerful, able to enhance the productivity of the center in unforeseen ways. Thus, and because one or two dragons would never be able to "donate" the amount of blood required, the resurrectionists, as the group around Albert Kavanagh had begun to call itself, decided to build more of these reactors -- especially since the first Tiamat dragon was willing and able to help in the modification of the reactors. It even had ideas on how to improve them. Since it proved impossible to build an alchemical fusion reactor which would survive the birth of a Tiamat, and because the reactors were so big that no facility at Aeon Labs disposal could hold more than one, it became necessary to modify several of

the reactors all around the world. Kavanagh pumped billions of dollars into new reactors, which were actually quick and easy to modify . . . just large and expensive. To the pride and joy of the resurrectionists all the newborn Tiamats were at least as loyal and obedient as the firstborn. One researcher said: "They are like little ducklings. They think we are their parents!" He was wrong.

Manila, the firstborn Tiamat, somehow succeeded in building a back door into all following dragon-reactor designs; all Dragon Lords had the ability to telepathically communicate by means of magic, but contrary to ordinary magical telepathy this communication seemed unaffected by distance, and could not be detected by normal magical means. One theory on this says that there exists a kind of communication channel through Yetzirah or Briah -- realms where distance has no meaning -- accessible only to the Dragon Lords. However that may be, Manila and its brethren instantly began to "assist" the cabalists in ways they never expected. Manila had come to the conclusion that mankind was the greatest single danger ever to the existence of dragons and other magical beings. Humans extinguished dragons before -- now they had guns and nukes: they would do it again. Only by wiping mankind from the face of the Earth could dragons once and forever take the place they deserved -- on top.

At the end of 2031 -- new reactors were still being modified, many even carefully camouflaged as real state-of-the-art fusion reactors -- the Tiamats unleashed necromantic rituals of truly unearthly effectiveness: the researchers and employees of every Aeon Lab with a Tiamat became vectors for terrifying plagues and diseases, while making them and their families were immune. At first. Thousands died, then millions. The first wave of plagues were just the equivalent of modern bioweapons. Then came diseases with magical reinforcements built in; only magic could cure them . . . *powerful* magic. As the world began to sink into chaos, many cabalists rejoiced; while they knew nothing about the true origin of the plagues, many thought that a new dark age would benefit those who knew magic -- and, of course, they wouldn't make the stupid mistakes they did during the last dark age! The Tiamats used these years to quietly gather allied forces around them, and in 2034 the Final War began. Hordes of werereatures, zombies, vampires, wraiths, elementals, liches, spirits, trolls, and uncounted lesser dragons from Aeon Labs' early experiments poured like rain upon a devastated planet. The Dragon Lords assumed their true forms and attacked capitals and military bases, mind-controlling or killing the inhabitants as they saw fit. The lodges reacted almost instantly, even if most knew nothing of the cabalistic origins of the creatures they were fighting. Adamant about its secrecy, the Cabal fought titanic battles out of sight of normal humans -- but the Tiamats had allies in dozens of lodges. Several Grand Masters died or vanished in those days, one of them being Koschei, who battled the Moscow Tiamat. The human military fared no better and was often just as panicked and disoriented as the civilian population it was supposed to protect; whole companies fell victim to hordes of zombies -- only to become zombies themselves. Several nuclear weapons were launched by all sides, some Dragon Lords vanished, but in the end the Dragons prevailed.

In 2037 the Final War officially ended with the Cabal in almost as bad a shape as the rest of the world. The remaining 18 Dragon Lords carved up the Earth and the Moon into 18 different zones, each to be the sole domain of one of them. The Dragon Lords instantly began to force their personal vision of the ideal world unto their zones. Some embraced mankind's technology, some demolished it. Some tried to extinguish even the last few millions of humans within their reach, others began to *use* them. Almost all of the Dragon Lords, however, began massive building and construction programs to transform the remains of human cities in their zones into strange embodiments of sacred architecture, the complexity and sheer weirdness of which had never been seen by human eyes -- at least in Assiah, that is. Humans had no place in those frightening expanses of stone and steel, where eldritch energies danced down streets and avenues once filled to the brim with human life and laughter.

The next couple of years were a time of construction and re-shaping in the zones. Every Dragon Lord tried to further the common cause of a magical world ruled by dragons to the best of its abilities and according to its own vision. Even the remains of the Cabal began to pull together. From the rubble of a civilization those humans with magic in their veins crawled like all the other survivors, and they found that not all undead and shapeshifters were eager to serve the great lizards. They also found that humans once again believed in magic. And the humans believed it was *evil*.

So the remains of the Cabal pulled together again. For survival. For revenge. The Dragon Lords, however, began to discover that they were very different indeed. Each Lord and its zone seemed to be dominated by one specific Decan -- even if it sometimes was unclear *which* Decan. The tensions between those Decans as well as the simple selfishness of the Dragon Lords could overshadow the "common cause" to such a degree that even wars between the zones

seemed feasible. Then in 2042 the cleanup of the New Zealand Manacrisis brought about the Brisbane accords (p. RS12) to regulate the relations between the Dragon Lords. But it is a shaky peace in a world where human and cabalistic resistance groups fight the dragons and their servants, where witch hunters working for dragons and humans alike threaten members of the Cabal, and where the Cabal still has to think about the qliphoth and Those Who Wait Beyond.

The World: America

Caracas (Charchnoumis)

This zone is ruled by a Dragon Lord with a strangely medieval Chimera-like appearance; several body parts of the master of Caracas look like they belong to different animals, like lions, goats, snakes, and eagles. Caracas' Decan expresses itself in its ultra-green politics, and its interest in creating new species. However, while it believes that humans as a species are an utter failure, it prefers to keep humanity's genetic potential alive -- and at its disposal for further tests and designs. Magic has given Caracas geneering abilities equivalent to TL10-11 technology!

Denver (Bianakith)

The master of Zone Denver is certainly the most terrifying for humans to look at: The mere sight of this draconic mountain of stitched-together human body parts, some of them still with seemingly active eyes, mouths, and hands, can shock even vampires into paralysis (fright check penalty of -12). Denver's master almost died in a nuclear explosion during the Final War, leading to massive tissue damage and rampant cancers in its body. Apparently the solution were human transplants, including brain grafts which heightened Denver's mental capacities. But, alas, the cure is not permanent: to keep the biomagical cancers at bay, not to mention its need for more intellectual prowess, Denver has to keep adding more and more human tissue to his already gargantuan body.

Mexico City (Eneuth)

This zone has been transformed by its master into a true hell-hole: The three-headed Dragon Lord is host and leader to thousands of fire elementals, djinn, pneumae, and -- as some believe -- demons. Mexico City thinks that not only humans but *all* biological life should be exterminated. However, fire needs fuel, and as such humans are still kept alive in certain areas -- only to become victims of the eventual demon-raid or FAE testing. Mexico City is very fond of modern technology, especially if it produces such wonderful things as napalm, FAEs, nuclear warheads, lasers, and microwave ovens. It is also co-funding certain research projects of Brisbane, and is rumored to have recently acquired several mil-spec maser prototypes . . .

Vancouver (Ieropael)

The zone of this metallic black Dragon Lord, who has uncut gems growing on his hide, is characterized by abundance and wealth. Vancouver controls vast amounts of raw materials -- and it considers humans to be one of them. Humans are kept like cattle and slaves, nothing more. While Vancouver *uses* a lot of technology in its vast industrial areas and mining sites, and even buys exterminator robots from Tokyo, it seems very conservative and is not really interested in any kind of scientific or technological research.

Washington (Ruax)

Maybe the most cunning of all Dragon Lords rules this zone, whose citizens were duped to believe that they are free and that their government is using the best of technology and magic to defend their freedom. The benevolent government even succeeded in breeding certain kinds of dragons to serve in its military forces -- and this dragon corps follows a great green dragon with fiery red eyes, who openly swore allegiance to humankind in the turmoils of the Final War! Life in Zone Washington is a lot like the life in an impoverished but technologically advanced version of the 1950s -- or better, Technomancer in the 1950s: The government is preaching a "Cold War" doctrine, which is used

as the reason for certain "Civil Inconveniences" like the Birthrate Regulations. Conspiracy theorists have several candidates for the Dragon Lord of this Zone, among them the President, the chief of the FBI, and the leader of the dragon corps.

Europe

Berlin (Harpax)

A garden. A jungle. That's probably the vision of the ideal world in the mind of Zone Berlin's master. This Dragon Lord is an enormous feathered serpent, with shimmering blue, red, and yellow feathers. But this beautiful entity sadly sees humans as a kind of plague, as vermin -- so it decided to become an exterminator. In Zone Berlin all living creatures are welcome, but plant life rules supreme, and there's always hunting season for humans and undead. Nature spirits and werereatures, especially werewolves, serve Berlin faithfully and will destroy any human settlement, killing all humans they can find.

London (Sephathrael)

The master of this Zone is an enigma: rarely seen, this Dragon Lord (who looks a bit like a giant plesiosaur and is believed by some to be the legendary Loch Ness monster) rules over the islands of this zone, but doesn't seem to care much about the humans, who live on them. Instead it seems that London is *searching* something in the ocean. London's servants are predominantly water elementals and certain werereatures and spirits. Those creatures and the vision of a clean Northern Sea also form an area of overlapping interests between Berlin and London, which may explain London's policy of "limited tolerance" vs. humans. The fact that human settlements are ignored as long as they don't pollute any body of water or create emissions which may lead to acid rain, causes humans on the islands to live at low TLs or use solar or wind energy.

Paris (Naoth)

Listening. Searching. Hoping. Paris' master, whose blue-gray eyes are actually *human*, is convinced that somewhere out there must exist another civilization on another world. Ancient -- like dragons. Wise -- like dragons. Only immortal and magical beings like dragons and their ilk could be the rulers of such an ultra-terrestrial world. Paris uses every means at its disposal, be it magical or technological, to comb through the vastness of astral and extra-terrestrial space. Humans are only a nuisance in this undertaking, since they are so blind to magic and since they and their settlements only use up valuable space and raw materials, much better used in the building of more VLA antennae.

Moscow (Sphandor)

A silent and wise great dragon, covered in strange hexagonal scales and with a long snake-like tail, rules over the expanses of Zone Moscow. Not necessarily friendly to humans, Moscow's dragon is intrigued by their culture, their science, and their long complicated history -- so it collects. Moscow's hoard consists of data and knowledge, so it is employing even humans to collect all the books and artworks they can get their hands on. Uneducated humans, however, are at best a source of cheap labor -- but still the labor camps of Zone Moscow are kept in decent conditions and have high survival rates.

Africa

Zaire (Kurtael)

Deep light-swallowing black is the color of this zone's Dragon Lord. Zaire is a zone where humans have only four things waiting for them: undeath, death as a ritual sacrifice, death as food for the undead, or just plain death. The roaming undead of Zone Zaire are the result of a simple logic of its master: use undead humans to kill other humans,

who also are turned into undead, thus killing more humans, etc. The fact that Zaire's undead often violate the borders to Paris and Tel Aviv -- sometimes in hot pursuit of humans, sometimes because zombies have lousy orientating skills -- has led to tense relationships with its northern neighbors.

Tel Aviv (Methiax)

Always shrouded in fog and never clearly seen is the great gray form of this Dragon Lord. It rules over its zone with a masquerade rivaling that of Washington: an army of spirits, loyal magicians, fae, duped followers, and illusionary creations spreads angelic tales of apocalypse and redemption across the deserts and mountains of the zone. While there are a few brave souls, who resist the lies, it is exceedingly hard to counter the "wonders" of the false prophets without fighting fire with fire -- yet there have recently been more and more rumors of "true" holy men wandering the land . . .

Asia

New Delhi (Anatreth)

A Dragon Lord like a super-sonic fighter plane, the master of Zone Delhi is a beautiful sleek dragon of deep violet . . . and *fast*. New Delhi is fascinated by space travel and technological progress, which has caused it to create an ambitious program for space travel and colonization. Since humans have managed to achieve an astounding speed of technological progress, they are -- for New Delhi -- far too valuable to eradicate. Instead, they should be tamed and become servants of the cause. Magic, technology, humans, parahumans, or spirits -- all are just a part of New Delhi's race for the stars.

Beijing (Iudal)

The Beyond. This is the main interest of the two-headed honey-colored Dragon Lord, who rules Zone Beijing. Humans are just unimportant -- as long as they can be kept low in numbers so that they cannot endanger the cause. This cause is to reach across the voids, which separate the stars and the astral from the material realms. Beijing's ultimate goal is to establish permanent gateways and "roads" between planets and realms, a goal which has lead it to sponsor certain projects of Brisbane. Since Beijing lacks New Delhi's obsession with speed it has recently begun to worry that it may lose the space race . . . but it is certain to be the leader as far as the astral realms are concerned. However, Beijing is painfully aware of Paris' attempts to contact extra- or ultraterrestrial draconic civilizations, fearing that Paris may actually find *something* out there, which would better be left undiscovered . . .

Asia and Australia

Brisbane (Kumeatel)

Nobody seems to know what this zone's Dragon Lord actually looks like, but this much is clear: it is not only one of the most mysterious, but also one of the most ambitious of all Dragon Lords. The secrets of magic are just one part of its many interests -- Brisbane is equally fascinated by the myriads of oddities cooked up by humans over the millennia -- be it psionics, cryptozoology, conspiracy theories, "secret" histories, UFOs, or the rubber science from certain works of human fiction. Where Moscow collects history books and works of art, Brisbane collects and analyzes *conspiracy* history books and ancient occultaria. It is always on the lookout for information about human "Top Secret" projects, including old Russian GKMR documents and tales of "Nazi Superscience". In fact, it may be the only Dragon Lord truly interested in the whole field of psionics. "Hard" science is much too confining for Brisbane's taste: it is constantly trying to push the boundaries of physical and parapsychical science into the realm of Anoster, the impossible and un-doable. Humans are important to Brisbane mainly because it needs them as guinea-pigs in its many experiments, some of which are rumored to have resulted in catastrophic mana-explosions or in the release of staggering amounts of psychic energy, thus destroying large research facilities.

Manila (Arotosael)

As far as anyone can tell, this large reddish-purple Dragon Lord with its impressive ram's horns was the first of its kind. Manila is still convinced that humans will have to be totally eradicated to ensure the eternal existence of dragons and other magical sentients. It is appalled by all ideas of symbiosis, and almost frightened by Brisbane's psionic experiments. Manila is the absolute master of death and destruction, rivaled only by Mexico City and Zaire. Technology and science are well-respected by this Dragon Lord, who runs hundreds of technomantic research and production facilities in Zone Manila -- many of them dedicated to developing better weapons and means of mass destruction. Mature nanotechnology is somewhat of a holy grail for Manila, which is the cause of its generous funding of nano-tech research by Tokyo and Brisbane.

Tokyo (Ouaire)

The mere appearance of this Dragon Lord has caused some, including other dragons, to utter some whispered doubts about its draconic nature: should size truly matter, then Tokyo's Lord is surely the greatest of all Dragon Lords, its wingspan alone measuring over 200' -- but this Dragon Lord looks like a gargantuan steampunk robot, completely made out of brass and bronze! True to its outward appearance, Tokyo is fascinated by and devoted to technology in every form, from automatic weapons to computers, from fusion power to robots. Rivaled only by Manila, Zone Tokyo has the most industrialized landscape on the planet -- a fact which has made its Lord enemies in Berlin, Caracas, and even London. Tokyo, however, has a problem: human junkrats who live hidden in the bleak wastelands of this zone. And it has a secret: Although the Dragon Lords did agree that they would be the only "Great" dragons on the planet, at least for the time being, Tokyo performed an experiment with bleeding-edge cyberware which was then used to augment four "ordinary" ancient dragons. The four showed highly increased intelligence and magical ability, so they were used as local governors . . . until they went rogue, that is. Now the four cyberdragons, who somehow gained the ability to morph their bodies into dozens of technical forms -- thus gaining effective disguises and extreme physical adaptability -- have gone into hiding and are thinking about contacting the human resistance, to use them for their own enigmatic cause.

Space

Luna (Phoubel)

The master of this zone was born from a newly installed fusion reactor at the Chinese moonbase Shuang Ti. The Dragon Lord quickly killed all humans in the base, but it found itself stranded on a barren rock in space. While the sharp distinctions between areas of light and utter darkness on the Moon were appreciated by the Dragon Lord, its (almost) unique physical situation forced it to rely on technology more than many of its brethren. The only "native" servants and allies of Luna are certain members of the fae, commonly depicted as "dark." Luna would like to build a mass driver or a permanent gate to Earth on the Moon, but both ideas have few friends among the other zones, the only exception being Orbital, which always likes to be paid in raw materials and sees no danger to itself in those endeavors. As it stands Luna is somewhat of a poor cousin to the other Dragon Lords when it comes to resources, servants, and geopolitical position -- all of which could play a deciding role once Tranquility makes its move.

Orbital (Roeled)

Like Luna, the master of Orbital was born from a seemingly normal fusion reactor, this one installed on the US space station *Liberty*. The great dragon covered in thick bronze armor plates, after neutralizing all humans on board, quickly realized its unique strategic position. Using space junk and magic, it transformed *Liberty* into a flying fortress, from which it took control over an army of reconnaissance, survey, weather, and communication satellites. Orbital is a technophile, if paranoid, Dragon Lord and manages the satellites around Earth for *all* zones. It is, however, very low on resources and hopes to move one or more small asteroids into Earth orbit in the near future -- especially since Orbital rarely leaves its "shell" and is loathe to move the whole station into the asteroid belt, even if that would be a wonderful place to built an even bigger and more secure fortress.

Facts & Rumors

The New Zealand Manacrisis

Started in 2040 on the northern island of New Zealand, Brisbane's Project Bandersnatch somehow went terribly wrong in 2042. It is unclear *what* exactly Project Bandersnatch was, but it is widely believed to have been a brute-force attempt to create the Philosopher's Stone. Whatever happened then and there, it *frightened* the Dragon Lords, and after several nuclear strikes to sterilize the alchemical laboratories and destroy the sacred architecture around them, both islands were permanently put under quarantine. Human groups who came close to the islands reported a strange pink haze lying over the coast. No news of the 400,000 humans inhabiting the islands in 2040 have since reached the rest of the world. Among the theories about the crisis there is the idea of an enormous Wild-mana area (p. CM93), as well as the vision of a rift in reality and a whole land controlled by the qliphoth . . .

The Grand Masters

The Final War took a heavy toll on the ranks of the Cabal, not even sparing the greatest of them. Koschei and Kavanagh are confirmed dead. Athene du Sarrazin, however, simply disappeared and is reported to be allied with Berlin and Caracas nowadays. She was declared traitor and outcast but so far no cabalist was able to bring in her hide. The relation between the reptoids and the Dragon Lords seems to be exceedingly bad, thus assuring Lord Kaas'sth'raa's loyalty to the Cabal. But one *new* Grand Master has risen from the ashes of the Final War: The Russian, his real identity is still a mystery, apparently defected from the GKMR to join the Cabal. His enormous psionic powers, rivaled only by Dr. Fang, allowed him to claim Grand Master status during the turmoil following the Final War. The true appearance of the Russian, who is rumored to operate mainly in the area around the Black Sea, is somewhat of a mystery: pictures of him don't exist, and those who have met him can only remember meeting an extremely average nondescript man of middle age . . .

Tranquility (Phthenoth)

This dragon may be the best evidence of Garravin's involvement with the resurrectionists. Rumor has it that two Dragon Lords were planned to emerge on the Moon, the one from Shuang Ti and one from the US base. But somehow the alchemical modifications of the fusion reactor of the American moon base were *altered*. So when the Final War began, there indeed was a dragon born from the reactor -- but it was isolated from the secret communication channel of the Dragon Lords, and, much worse than that, it seemed confused and unwilling to kill off the humans on its base. Orbital immediately reacted with a magically-reinforced nuclear strike to wipe out the renegade dragon and its base -- and it succeeded. Or so it seemed. Tranquility, weak as it was in the days of the Final War, is closely tied to Phthenoth, the Decan of healing. Alone among all Dragon Lords even magic could not prevent its return from death. Hiding in spirit form it waited for its body to regenerate. Tranquility had sensed the oncoming attack and had placed several dozen humans in magical hibernation in the bunkers of the station. Those and others, who had died in the attack but had left behind a mostly intact corpse, then were slowly restored to life by Tranquility but kept in hibernation. The slim lavender-colored Dragon Lord found that many of the Fae were sympathetic to its cause and so it began rebuilding the base with their help. Today it is 2047 and Tranquility's work is almost done. Tranquility Station has become a magical maze of living steel and stone, able to regenerate itself. The Dragon Lord has used its magical affinity to the Moon to grow in power and body and will soon start to re-awaken the sleepers; it has detected magical and psionic potential in some of them and it needs allies . . .

The Great Library of the Cabal

The Great Library still exists -- in Zone Moscow. While there is still an "official" Great Library in Zone London, its contents are slowly being transferred or, more often, copied to Zone Moscow's own great collection. The Cabal has succeeded in subverting a part of Moscow's effort for its own cause, thus creating a new "library within the library" in Zone Moscow. The old collection in Zone London, however, is still being kept as a backup. This is easy to accomplish

since Moscow's master is usually content to receive copies. Moscow's Info Commandos also make a great cover for traveling cabalists and as postmen for the cabal.

The Few, the Proud, the Undead

Zone Washington has a retirement plan unlike any other for the best members of WASP (p. RS26). Those killed or crippled in the line of duty are turned into powerful undead, usually wraiths or vampires, and made members of the secret 13th division of WASP. Members of this division are accompanied in their missions by powerful elementals and black "stealth" dragons (p. T58).

Antarctica

This continent is neutral territory and off-limits to any exploitation or exploration by the Dragon Lords -- or so they agreed. Orbital, however, responsible for the control and enforcement of this accord, was recently bribed heavily by an unknown party that is now busy building some strange structures deep within the frozen wastes -- or maybe those activities are just excavations . . .

Qlippothic Contamination

Some of the more paranoid members of the Cabal are convinced that the qlippoth have gained major footholds in Assiah since the Final War. And while few cabalists believe that *all* Dragon Lords are in league with the qlippoth (or worse), almost any cabalist has his pet theory about those zones and Dragon Lords which suffer from a qlippothic contamination. The favorites in this contest are Denver, Manila, and Zaire, closely followed by Washington, Tel Aviv, Berlin, and Paris.

The Others

The Cabal is still not the only supernatural conspiracy on the market. In 2047 the Societas Sancti di Leonis has become one of the most influential orders of the catholic church. A secret monastery of the order in Scotland harbors a college for the education of white magicians and exorcists -- and there are even rumors in the New Irish Vatican that the next pope might be a Leonide. Exodus 22, however, managed to gain a firm foothold within Zone Washington. It controls at least parts of the FBI, and while it does see the Dragon Lords as infernal monsters, it also seems convinced of Washington's independence and is more concerned with the threat of "witches" within the borders of mankind's "last best hope" than with some distant lizards. No one seems to know anything of the fate of the Chevaliers de la Crane, except for the usual paranoid theories which see them as pawns of Caracas or Zaire or both. No such difficulties arise when it comes to the Sirri: their Brazilian branch now serves Caracas openly, while the Sirri on the African continent are apparently busy fighting the Dragon Lord of Zaire. The GKMR, on the other hand, may have been changed the most by the Reign of Fire: this "psionic Russian Mafia" has turned into a vicious force of the resistance within the past 15 years. Some even see it -- and not the Cabal, Luzifer, or some Dragon Lord -- as the driving force behind the resistance organization known as SWORD (the equivalent of VIRUS from *Reign of Steel*). Sadly, this does not mean peace and harmony between the Cabal and the GKMR -- old grudges die hard and there is a bitter rivalry between the two groups. The defection of the Russian (see the entry on Grand Masters) has not helped in this.

Luzifer

There exist persistent rumors about a "renegade Dragon Lord", hunted by its brethren and allied with humanity's cause. This entity, often called Luzifer, is said to roam the land shapeshifted into the form of an incredibly handsome and charismatic young man -- seven foot tall and with long black hair. He never stays in one place for long, but he is willing and able to help humans against the dragons -- for a price. Some, especially witch hunters, say that "Luzifer's price" is always the soul, that he is the Lord of Hell, the fallen angel called the Morning Star, and the "Great Dragon" from the Book of Revelation. Others say that he (other than the other Dragon Lords no one refers to Luzifer as "it") is the Dragon of Rebellion, that he is served by "The Devil's Angels" a pack of *good* wizards and undead, and that he

was once human. Nobody knows the truth but the tales of Luzifer are comforting to humans and are being told in the Americas, Europe, Russia, and the Middle East.

Dragon Lord Template

There is no such thing as a Dragon Lord template; or, to be exact, nobody is sure how this template should look like. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of theories about the true nature of the Dragon Lords: powerful eikones, aliens from beyond the stars, ancient dragons returned to Assiah, pawns of the qliphoth, magical "Jurassic Park" dinosaurs, products of powerful alchemy like homunculi, or something a lot worse . . . However, some things are almost certain: all Dragon Lords possess some version of the Vampiric Resurrection advantage (probably limited by magical damage), they also all have the Secret Communication advantage, all of them are Mana Generators (personal only, one level), they have enormous physical power (ST320+, HT16/200+), and at least some of them can exist in vacuum. Everything else is guesswork (and up to the GM).

Roleplaying During the Reign of Fire

Characters

All the character types from "standard" *Reign of Steel* have a place in a Reign of Fire campaign -- but all of them can be had in a magical or psionic variant. It is also possible to play witch hunters, vampires (who *really* feel the low population density in zones other than Washington and London), shapeshifters, and the whole range of strange creatures who may have found a home in the Cabal.

Magic

It exists. That much is common knowledge. But the vast majority has no idea how it works or where it comes from -- and most Dragon Lords would like to keep it that way. Many nomad packs have priests, shamans, or wizards who know one or two tricks -- but that is it. In Washington *licensed* magic is legal, but even those mages know next to nothing about their trade. In game terms this means that non-cabalists only have access to spells from the *Basic Set* -- unless they serve the dragons, of course.

Psionics

Dragons don't get it. Not a single one of the great lizards understands or has any psionic powers. This seems to have lead to a certain paranoia of the Dragon Lords when it comes to psionics. The only exceptions to this are Brisbane and Washington, even if Washington's interests concentrate solely on Telepathy and Psychic Vampirism. Being a known psi with powers other than those two equals a death penalty in Zone Washington. In other zones where humans are otherwise tolerated, especially Tel Aviv, Moscow, London, and New Delhi, *all* psis are being hunted -- even if rumor has it that Tel Aviv and Moscow have a very few psis in their service. Generally those with unwanted or unlicensed psionic powers in Zone London and Zone Washington, as well as those who live in camps in the zones of Tel Aviv, Moscow, and New Delhi should have a Secret [-30] or take appropriate enemies.

Technology

The TL of this setting is slightly lower than that of *GURPS Reign of Steel*. The reason for this is the lack of enthusiasm many Dargon Lords have when it comes to technology. While many Lords are willing to use existing technology, only Brisbane, Tokyo, New Delhi, and Manila invest any serious amount of resources into research. Others, especially Berlin and London, seem to hate and distrust any modern technology. This means that no TL9 items exist, at least not outside of Brisbane's laboratories. Washington, however, is a mid-TL8 society, even if most of its citizens live without luxuries of any kind. Most of the available tech outside of Zone Washington and Zone Tokyo will be late-TL7 to early-TL8 stuff -- and outside of Zone Tokyo there are no robots from which to rip spare parts for your

bleeding edge TL8 equipment.

Adventure Seeds

The God Machine

A highly believable rumor reaches the PC's ears: somewhere in their area there lives a crazy old man who once worked in the inner circle of Kavanagh's research team -- and he is supposed to know the secret of the Tiamat reactors! With his help it might even be possible to modify a fusion reactor into the birthplace of a *truly* loyal Dragon Lord. Some even believe that the principle could be used to create (or call?) a more benevolent or powerful entity, like an incarnated archangel . . . Is the rumor true? Will it matter, when everybody, from religious fanatics to draconic agents, tries to get his hands on the old man? What if the old man knows nothing, but dies in the arms of the PCs, so everybody thinks *they* know the secret?

A Plague of Demons?

Some experiment of Brisbane or Caracas seems to have resulted in the creation of a couple of new supernatural species: all over the planet strange plants and animals are turning up -- and they are fertile, hungry, and *tough!* Are they maybe demons? Nobody knows, and no one seems to know what to do about them: in some zones they are hunted, in some ignored, and some try to domesticate them (with little success). This could be a *really* deadly setting, especially if you just use the creatures from *War against the Chtorr!* The PCs could be anything, from professional Enterprisefish hunters in Zone Washington to resistance fighters in Zone Berlin for whom life just got a lot more interesting . . .

Divine Intervention

The rumors of *true* holy men in and around Zone Tel Aviv have just become a lot more intense: It is reported that a prophet has appeared in the Holy Land, and that he and his circle of disciples are wandering across the Middle East performing miracles and wonders. Even spies of the Cabal tell of evidence of strange magic, done without the necessary rituals, yet powerful and reliable. What is going on down there? The heroes could be agents of the Cabal or the Vatican send to investigate this "clerical magic" -- even the Dragon Lords of Moscow or Brisbane might be interested in this. Or they could come from Zone Tel Aviv and search out this prophet in hope of salvation . . .

A Whole Different Ballgame

A GM could also decide to use this kind of setting as the backdrop of a *heroic* fantasy campaign. And with all these dragons, undead, mages, and shapeshifters around -- why not just use *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*? Use the rules for (ultra) modern weapons from any number of *d20* books -- be they for *Weird War*, *Spycraft*, *Dragonstar*, or *Traveller d20* -- and of you go: Clerics and paladins could be "true" holy men, either independent or working for the Vatican, psions and psychic warriors form the ranks of the GKMR, and monks roam the rubble of Zone Tokyo. Just have fun!

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Call No Man Happy Until He Is Dread

Dark Lords in *GURPS Discworld*

by Phil Masters

(Note: This article was, of course, inspired by certain passages in Terry Pratchett's *The Last Hero*, which is really mandatory reading for anyone inspired by it. And for everyone else, of course.)

While the Discworld isn't exactly a conventional fantasy world, its inhabitants are at least somewhat aware of the conventions of fantasy, and sometimes live by them. Thus, its Dark Lords are, so to speak, the mirror image of its barbarian heroes (as discussed in *GURPS Discworld* and *GURPS Discworld Also*); people who choose to manifest some of the most central, powerful fantasy conventions of all. The two character types aren't so much antagonists -- although traditionally, barbarian heroes do spend a proportion of their time hewing their way across guard-infested throne rooms on the way to ornate raised thrones occupied by scowling figures -- as they are *opposite numbers*, equally idealistic figures who've chosen to pursue a different destiny.

That said, Dark Lords are rather rarer than barbarian heroes, especially late in the Century of the Fruitbat. The fact is, barbarian heroism has the advantage of a certain clear, solipsistic simplicity; any itchy kid can take up a big sword, pull on a loincloth, and set out to carve his way to glory, and some turn out to be good at it (or just lucky). Dark Lording demands focus and a willingness to become a part of society (of a sort). One must (or at least should) recruit dim-witted guards, build a suitably grim and imposing palace and a matching reputation, and even plan for the long term. Or at least the medium term, if one insists on being slightly more realistic.

Plus, well, Dark Lords just aren't as popular as barbarian heroes. Much as they may complain about the psychotic mood swings and perpetual brawling, ordinary folk have a certain cautious respect and sentimental fondness for hero types, and sometimes, well, it turns out to be necessary to hire someone like that to deal with dangerous wildlife or annoying bandits or whatever. Dark Lords may be living up to popular storytelling conventions, but they're still professionally nasty, when all's said and done. They don't get as many girls; they do get angry mobs. For all the cringing minions, it's a lonely career choice.

Still, some people appreciate the dark grandeur of commitment to this role, and there's always some appeal to bossing the neighbors around and ordering annoying tradesmen put to death, so even in this late and decadent age, there's still a few folk out there willing to give it a go. It might even appeal to a few players who want to try something different as a PC.

And Remember, Just Don't Smile: The Dark Lord Code

Let's be clear; we're not just talking about *villains* here. Anyone can be vicious, mean, self-centred, and greedy, on the Disc or anywhere else. If we're going to talk about proper Dark Lords, we have to focus on people who're willing to live up to every part of the image, good and bad. This can be dangerously limiting -- definitely a Disadvantage, in game terms -- but it can have subtle benefits, in a give-and-take sort of way.

For a big example, let's talk about escape tunnels. Any Dark Lord who knows his job understands that a proper palace, castle, or secret hideout *must* have a hidden emergency exit; angry mobs and lucky heroes are just too commonplace to ignore the threat. Smart heroes and mob leaders understand this rule, too. *Really* smart ones tactfully ignore it. Defeating and deposing foul enemies is cool and profitable; accepting that, by and large, they'll get away is, well, making sure of future employment. These unwritten rules benefit everybody. However, if the opposition don't respect the conventions, neither will the forces of righteousness. Escape tunnels will be blocked up early. You get the general idea.

(Note: Unfortunately, too many mobs and armies *aren't* playing by the rules these days, whatever the Dark Lords do. This is leading to painful attrition in the ranks of Dark Lords. It's very sad, at least from the point of view of traditionalists.)

In *GURPS* terms, these rules can be defined as follows:

Code of Honor (Dark Lord)

-10 or -15 points

You are committed to the pursuit of power and self-satisfaction, but as importantly, to getting there with *style*. Mere triumph is not enough; you have to achieve it in a way that vindicates your approach, and which demonstrates the superiority of your intellect, willpower, and chosen weapons. The principles which you follow may seem selfish, but they are clear and strong nonetheless.

You only break your word in large matters, and in a way which causes your victims to curse your treacherous nature; if you make smaller promises, you will keep them, as of course the destined ruler of the world can afford to do so. Never ignore an insult to yourself, your schemes, or the symbols of your rule; rant a lot at whoever is responsible, and then take a complicated revenge. Always take advantage of strong opponents, but only in dramatic and highly visible ways, and if your victims are "obviously" defeated and helpless, engage in some token gloating and then ignore them while you get on with important matters. Weapons and circumstances should be as unequal as possible; you use hideously overcomplicated deathtraps and ornate, flared, barbed, and smoke-blackened blades, leaving opponents with simple swords and their wits. (Note that this code only really applies between Dark Lords and hero types; disrespect from peasants and the like calls for a sneer and a dismissive use of overwhelming force, not a rant.)

If you are male, you treat women with florid courtesy that obviously overlays a deeply lascivious nature. If you are female, you are slightly more open about your treatment of men, making it clear that you regard them either as fools or as sex objects, and if you're the modern, sophisticated type, your approach to other women has an unnerving breathy slinkiness about it. You also believe in hospitality, providing visitors who aren't yet scheduled for the deathtrap with comfortable lodgings, submissive servants (who should really either be spies or ridiculously easy to subvert), and even a change of clothes.¹

For -10 points, you live by this code, but you don't forget that the point of being a villain is to win, and dying counts as losing in your book; hence, while the Code drives you to a lot of bad decisions, you can claim with a fairly straight face that it's subordinate to staying alive, or that it's a way to ensure a bit of respect from others. For -15 points, you must live by *every* aspect of the Code, at whatever threat to your own life. (Well, backing down when there's a sword at your throat is understandable -- and quite villainous -- but a self-respecting Dark Lord will then immediately start plotting his reversion to type.) Frankly, while the -10-point version makes you look stylish, the -15-pointer makes you look like a bit of a pantomime character. But some people think that there's no point in being a Dark Lord if you don't take it to the limit.

* * *

As another aspect of their Code, Dark Lords generally choose servants of exceptional stupidity. This is partly good sense of a sort -- after all, these people will be treated as completely disposable when the roof starts caving in and the heroes charge the throne, and it's a lot easier to hire rampant stupidity than it is to inculcate real, to-the-death, fanatical loyalty. For that matter, given the nature of standard Dark Lord personnel relations and organizational risk-management procedures, the hired help really have to be pretty dumb. But mostly, it's *tradition*. When a Dark Lord screams "Am I surrounded entirely by incompetents?" or "Do I have to do everything myself?" -- well, the answers are "Yes" and "Yes." Anything else means that he isn't a Dark Lord; he's just an organization man.

Alert Internet-using gamers will be aware of a document that defines quite precisely how self-respecting Dark Lords should live; the [Evil Overlord List](#). (The discussions of Dark Lord traditions in *The Last Hero* seem to be a pretty explicit tribute to that list, in fact.) It's well worth any player or GM who's planning to play a Dark Lord printing off the list, reading through it carefully -- and then carefully ignoring every word. Remember, full-face helmets are fine

fashion statements for guards, extended explanations are a way of demonstrating one's superior intellect, and physically attractive rebels of the opposite sex must all be assumed to be highly susceptible to the Dark Lord's personal charms. Anything less would be a betrayal of generations of tradition, and would take away the whole point of following this difficult and under-appreciated career path.

Anyway . . . Any PC or major NPC who wants to be considered a proper Dark Lord really *must* take the above Code of Honor, and live by the associated rules. Plenty of people who look a bit like Dark Lords don't, but they're *not* Dark Lords; they're just villains. In fact, it can be used in the following:

Born to Ruin: The Dark Lord Template (100 points)

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 10 [0].

Advantages: Ally Group (2-5 75-point minions, appear 12 or less) [20]; Comfortable Wealth [10]; Fearlessness +2 [4]; Full Literacy [5]; Status +2 [10]; and 30 points from: improved Attributes [varies]; Absolute Timing [5]; Acute senses [2/level]; Alertness [5/level]; Ally (trusted lieutenant, backroom necromancer, etc.; may be Unwilling) [varies]; larger, more capable, or more frequently available Ally Group [varies]; Attractive Appearance [5]; Charisma [5/level]; Clerical Investment [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Contacts (spies) [varies]; Cultural Adaptability [25]; Danger Sense [15]; Daredevil [15]; Disease-Resistant or Immunity to Disease [5 or 10]; Enhanced Dodge [15]; Extra Life [25]; additional Fearlessness [2/level]; Hard to Kill [5/level]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Intuition [15]; Less Sleep [3/level]; Luck [15 or 30]; Night Vision [10]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Reputation (as a potential employer, among scum and warrior losers) [varies]; Single-Minded [5]; additional Status [5/level]; Strong Will [4/level]; Temperature Tolerance [1/level]; Voice [10]; Voice of Command [15]; or additional Wealth [varies].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Dark Lord) [-10]; and a total of -25 points from increasing the Code to -15 points [-5]; Age [varies]; Albinism [-10]; reduced Appearance [varies]; Attentive [-1]; Bad Smell [-10]; Bad Temper [-10]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Bully [-10]; Callous [-6]; Clueless [-10]; Compulsive Spending [varies]; Compulsive Vowing [-5]; Cowardice [-10]; Cursed (Divine Curse) [varies]; Delusions [varies]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Dreamer [-1]; Easy to Read [-10]; Enemies [varies]; Extravagance [-10]; Fanaticism (self) [-15]; Fat [varies]; Gigantism [-10]; Glory Hound [-15]; Greed [-15]; Gullibility [-10]; Hunchback [-10]; Imaginative [-1]; Jealousy [-10]; Lecherousness [-15]; Low Empathy [-15]; Lunacy [-10]; Manic-Depressive [-20]; Megalomania (requires Fanaticism) [-10]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Oblivious [-3]; Odious Personal Habit (ranting) [varies]; One Eye [-15]; Overconfidence [-10]; Paranoia [-10]; Proud [-1]; Reclusive [-10]; Reputation (as, well, a big bad person) [varies]; Sadism [-15]; Secret [varies]; Self-Centered or Selfish [-10 or -5]; Skinny [-5]; Social Stigma (Overdressed Foreigner) [-10]; Solipsist [-10]; Sterile [-3]; Stubbornness [-5]; Trademark [varies]; Truthfulness [-5]; Unluckiness [-10]; Vow [varies]; or Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills: Intimidation (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Leadership (M/A) IQ [2]-13.

Secondary Skills: Riding (P/A) DX-1 [1]-10; Savoir-Faire (M/E) IQ+2 [0]-15; Tactics (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-11; and 4 points in any Combat/Weapon skill or skills of choice.

Background Skills: A total of 7 points in any of Acting (M/A); Administration (M/A); Alchemy (Discworld) (M/H); Appreciate Beauty (M/VH); Area Knowledge (own domains or region or the entire Disc) (M/E); Bard (M/A); Chess (M/E); Detect Lies (M/H); Fast Talk (M/A); Hidden Lore (M/A); Holdout (M/A); Intelligence Analysis (M/H); Interrogation (M/A); Languages to taste (M/A); Occultism: Demonology (M/A); Performance/Ritual (M/A); Poisons (M/H); Sacrifice (note prerequisite) (M/H); Shouting at Foreigners (M/H); Stealth (P/A); Strategy (M/H); Streetwise (M/A); Thanatology (M/H); Theology (M/H); or Traps/TL (M/A).

Notes: If buying Wealth up (and really, high Wealth is obligatory for any Dark Lord above the rank beginner level), don't forget the bonus to Status. Note also that high Status grants a free IQ+2 default to Savoir-Faire skill (factored in above), and that some of the Disadvantages offered carry penalties to skills. A Dark Lord really should have plenty of Quirks, by the way.

One option for an Ally, especially among more *thoughtful* Dark Lords, is an Igor (see *GURPS Discworld Also*, pp.DA60-1). Others include renegade wizards or occasionally witches to provide magical firepower, and burly warriors in really fancy black armor to provide plain muscle or tactical command functions. None of these are mandatory, but a Dark Lord who wants to last a novel rather than a short story will need at least one such assistant, if only for ablative protection.

Merging this template with a wizard template from *GURPS Discworld Also*, or adding ST, DX, HT, and better weapon skills, will make for a truly formidable (and accordingly expensive) Dark Lord who really *can* do everything - or at least most things -- himself. Of course, the focus needed to achieve high ratings in these other fields rather distracts from proper Dark Lording, and it's generally at least assumed that Unseen University looks askance at graduates who go into the conquest business, but some people manage it.

Darkness on the Edge of Town: The HQ

Every serious Dark Lord dreams of settling down in a place of his own, although to begin with, a certain amount of leading armies in rampages of conquest (or running to keep ahead of heroes, or indeed angry peasants) is part of the accepted career path.

The ideal Dark Lord HQ is of course a looming dark tower, built of cyclopean masonry and with no or only small windows.² However, some Dark Lords develop a taste for underground complexes,³ and others make do with what they can find. After all, getting somebody in to build a proper tower is going to be a long and expensive process, and too many builders are prone to demanding payment in advance, especially when your job specification uses words like "evil" and "threatening" in every line. Thus, until one gets to the level of supernatural oomph which can work up the full flame-illuminated black stone number at a gesture (preferably complete with local external climate and lighting control), it's often easier to take over and adapt existing structures. These then have to be embellished to accepted Dark Lord standards; aside from choice of building materials, there's other things which work well on a budget, such as making as many fixtures and fittings as possible smoke-blackened (using cheap fuel keeps costs *and* lighting levels down *and* smoke volumes up -- a triple win), and maybe inviting a few families of gargoyles to move in and improve the look of the battlements.

That said, a *good* HQ really will feature some quite radically divergent architectural options. For example, most sensible large houses in low-tech societies have stables *outside*, while fortresses have big courtyards where things like animals can be looked after. Dark Lords, by contrast, want **towers**. Plain towers, with no outbuildings to diminish the effect. If they therefore have to keep their Steeds of Doom indoors, well, the smell must be regarded as a small price to pay. And talking of those steeds -- the front door has to be big. When the Dark Lord or his Trusted Lieutenants Ride Forth, they should expect to be able to do so at an imposing walk if not a full gallop, and preferably three abreast if they want. If that means that they need indefensibly large, vulnerable doors, well so be it.

Despite the budget options, it's clear that, in game terms, a Dark Lord needs well above average Wealth levels, and may have problems until the local peasantry are well and truly oppressed. This in turn leads many Dark Lords who are still on the way up to cut corners -- or rather, to lurk in them, limiting themselves to embarrassingly small secret lairs. This is well enough if they can at least manage one of the aforementioned underground labyrinths, but others play far too dangerously with their own images; a Modest Town House Of Despair really doesn't cut it. This is, at least, one good reason why Dark Lords should go out adventuring; looking for some abandoned ruin which they can convert inexpensively to their requirements sometimes seems like a good plan. The drawback is that they can't always select the location as precisely as they might choose -- sullen remoteness is all very well, but you've got to be within striking distance of worthwhile conquests -- but a smart Dark Lord can adapt.

Interior Decor

Given that the job sometimes involves entertaining -- whether the guests are willing and/or invited, or, more likely, not -- a Dark Lord has to worry as much about the internal as the external structure of his HQ. Vicious and devious traps are, of course, the first concern, but a Dark Lord on the way up will usually discover, after some initial experiments,

that it's possible to go too far with these. When one carefully recruits underlings for limited intellect, too many traps with too cleverly refined disarming mechanisms can mean that one loses staff far more rapidly than one actually nails those annoying keen-eyed heroic interlopers. Anyway, a certain style and even restraint in trap design is part of the Code. Anyone can make their home lethally dangerous; it's making it *interesting* that's the challenge.

Low lighting levels are certainly part of the deal -- and also unavoidable, if you've managed to avoid having too many windows -- but other than that, there's really no reason to cut back on creature comforts too far. If the lighting is low enough, visitors are unlikely to notice that your Dark Throne has a nice comfy seat cushion, and anyway, a certain amount of Decadent Luxury is part of the image (unless you're going for the full ascetic Grim And Inhuman Overlord effect, which really does take dedication). As for your staff, well, if you can afford it, they probably deserve some comforts, which may also help to keep them loyal, and may cause them to Go Soft, which is *another* part of the Code in some people's books. Anyway, that brings us on to the next and final section . . .

It's a Death Trap, It's a Suicide Rap: Underlings

Because lastly, it's worth considering those people who form a significant part of the above template, and indeed of the whole Dark Lord ethos; the Minions.

In fact, these tend to come in various levels of competence -- note all the talk about "elite troops" at the climax of many stories involving Dark Lords. The Ally Group included in the template represent a personal following -- the relatively tough guards around the throne who can make a Final Confrontation scene relatively interesting without the throne room having to be packed to the rafters with disposable thugs. Still, all that's *absolutely* needed is someone to slow the opposition down a little while the Dark Lord gloats and/or makes a break for the secret tunnel (thus escaping to ensure a sequel).

Reasonably successful Dark Lords recruit whole Dark Armies of rather less personal followers, who are merely employees rather than Allies, and who probably have significantly lower points totals. Heroes traditionally chew through these with contemptuous ease, although sheer numbers can be a problem after a while. They can be represented with standard *GURPS* "minor character" stats -- say ST 11, DX 10, IQ 8, HT 10, and a couple of weapon skills at around 12. For the elite, personal following, however, it's worth offering a more detailed character sheet:

Dark Lord Minion (75 points)

Attributes: ST 13 [30]; DX 12 [20]; IQ 9 [-10]; HT 12 [20].

Advantages: Either Combat Reflexes [15] *or* any one of Alertness +2, Extra Hit Points +2, Fearlessness +5, High Pain Threshold, Night Vision, or Toughness (DR 1) [all 10], plus any one of Collected, Deep Sleeper, Disease-Resistant, Full Literacy, or Rapid Healing [all 5].

Disadvantages: Duty (to the Dark Lord, 12-) [-10], plus any one of Bad Temper, Bloodlust, Bully, Clueless, Confused, Easy to Read, Gigantism, Gullibility, Impulsiveness, Indecisive, Intolerance, Jealousy, Literal-Minded, No Sense of Humor, Odious Personal Habits (-2 reactions), Overconfidence, Self-Centered, Selfless, Social Stigma (minority group or overdressed foreigner), Solipsist, Struggling, or Ugly [all - 10].

Quirks: Add two to taste; common choices include things like "Thinks he's a real ladies' man," "Addresses all opponents as 'Scum,'" or Alcohol Intolerance (see p.CI79). [-2]

Skills: Axe/Mace-12 [2]; Blackjack-12 [1]; Brawling-12 [1]; Broadsword-12 [2]; Gambling-8 [1]; Interrogation-8 [1]; Intimidation-10 [3]; Knife-12 [1]; Polearm-11 [1]; Riding (horse)-11 [1]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-9 [1]; Scrounging-9 [1]; Shield-12 [1]; Spear Throwing-12 [1]; Streetwise-9 [2]; Survival (any one terrain type)-8 [1]; Tactics-7 [1].

According to the precise nature of the Dark Lord and his organization, GMs might like to adjust the Duty (quite possibly making it Extremely Hazardous), or even switch it for a Sense of Duty if the follower is actually motivated by some kind of personal loyalty rather than simply having blundered into this job and lacking the sense to get out. For

that matter, an unusually sentimental Dark Lord might represent a Patron (or an Ally, depending on points levels); arguably, anyone with an Ally Group is in this position towards its members, but it was left off the minion character sheet as just being too contrary to the Dark Lord ethos. And yes, Dark Lords are forever losing experience bonuses for betraying their Ally Groups. It beats dying alongside them.

Successful Dark Lords, with rule over substantial territories, grant their minions 10 or 15 point Legal Enforcement Powers, and probably a bit of Status. This can all help raise the Ally Group members' points values to 100 each; upgrading the Advantage is all part of getting on in the Dark Lord business. (Conversely, minions whose Dark Lord tries too hard can gain Enemies, which can balance any points gains.)

Note also that this *is* merely a typical, "general purpose" follower.⁴ Players and GMs should feel free to rearrange the design and even come up with completely new character concepts, covering, say, burly, sadistic, but gullible jailers, swift-footed messengers with no sense of self-preservation, deeply unprepossessing spies, minor Trusted Lieutenants who can actually go one-on-one with a hero for a reasonable time, and so on.

As all the above should make doubly clear, proper Dark Lords recruit for stupidity; it reduces the dangers of excess ambition or refusal to obey suicidal orders, and generally fits with the Code. In fact, the hard core of the profession pride themselves on the dumbness of their minions. It *is* possible to find people with functioning brains in the service of a Dark Lord, but they'll usually be rated as Trusted Lieutenants rather than underlings. At best, they can be treated as individual Allies, and given character sheets not that unlike a Dark Lord themselves, or a modified version of something out of *GURPS Warriors* or maybe *GURPS Wizards*; perhaps more common, however, is the ambitious type. Just because a Lieutenant is Trusted, doesn't automatically mean that the trust is justified. Entry into the profession of Dark Lording can be difficult, and sometimes, an *ad hoc* apprenticeship ends rather sooner and more messily than the mentor intended.

Family: Another variation on this theme appears when a Dark Lord not only stays in touch with his family, but gets on well enough with them to let a few of them stay around the Dark Tower. Sometimes, this means a cackling crone-witch of an aunt in some side room (reserved, pleasant-featured aunts, with or without magical talent, would be letting the Code down), but any Dark Lord with long-term ambitions will really want children -- and a few somehow manage it. Sons, unfortunately, seem to slip into the Unwisely Trusted Lieutenant role with appalling ease; being brought up by someone with lousy parenting skills, who nonetheless convinces you that you're an Heir To Power, is doubtless bad for team spirit and moral sense. Daughters, who traditionally take after their mothers for looks (save that they may inherit their father's tendency to darkness, at least in hair color), are prone to the Convent Schoolgirl Stereotype problem; being sheltered and spoilt, they fall for the first well-built male hero who walks through the door, and things go downhill from there. Ah well, at least it's in accordance with the Code.

Non-Human Minions: Most Dark Lords are equal opportunity employers (except in the matter of intelligence); they rather pride themselves on hiring the scum of every community on the Disc. Dwarf minions are rare, but highly valued for their bullet-headed robustness; they can be trusted to obstruct any onrushing heroes for just that crucial moment longer. In game terms, you can add the dwarf racial package to the above character sheet, which costs a net 18 points as it comes complete with Axe/Mace skill at DX, and then find another -18 points in Disadvantages from somewhere. (It's not hard; just pull a couple more off the options list.)

Troll minions are even more pleasing, on the surface, being blessed with vast natural stupidity and resilience, but trolls sometimes have a certain rock-headed common sense which makes them surprisingly tricky to employ. Still, plenty of Dark Lords have worked well with trolls. In game terms, trolls have to be bought as individual Allies or, at a pinch, as members of a 100-point Ally Group; if you're in a hurry, use the "Hick Troll" template on p.DA60 of *GURPS Discworld Also* as a model for the latter.

Undead and other creatures of the night also have a traditional place as minions (especially for Dark Lords with magical talent or a theological bent) and a high points cost. Vampires are more likely to go into the Dark Lord business themselves than to serve others (and werewolves really wouldn't get on with Dark Lords, by and large), but zombies (see pp.DA29-31) are, well, made to serve. The snag, again, is the high points cost, which may be reduced by piling on the Disadvantages (zombies do lose body parts rather easily), but not usually much below 100 points, if that.

Lastly, a really good Dark Lord HQ may have some Gargoyles (see pp.DA25-6), as already mentioned, and might feature a Bogeyman or two (pp.DA22-3) in the cellars or under the stairs, but those are more in the nature of free-willed and independent-minded architectural features than sidekicks.

¹ Your guest wardrobe tends to have a lot of black leather or metallic swimwear; you *know* that guests will appreciate this.

² Basalt or obsidian are considered the best choice of stone, although they cost a mint and are a pain to work; use of black cladding over more mundane structural minerals is frankly tacky, but if the cowed peasantry don't get close enough to see, well, where's the harm?

³ Although these seem to attract a certain class of hero like wasps to open jam jars, almost always in small mixed parties of thugs, kleptomaniacs, god-botherers and UU rejects, for some reason.

⁴ Who can put up a tolerable fight with whatever weapons come to hand rather than being really useful with any of them.

Ignore At Your Peril

Warning Signs A Gaming Group Is Self-Destructing

by Sean M. Dugan

Often the greatest challenge facing a GM isn't devising a cunning puzzle, clever plot twist or terrifying monster -- it's recognizing the warning signs of a gaming group in peril. It's the feeling that lately, something's lacking in your gaming group. The last campaign -- it was the stuff of legends, destined for years of gaming convention war stories. But not this time. Every session the group straggles in later and later. One player chronically cancels at the last minute. Last week, the group squabbled for hours over a simple pit trap -- and you're pretty sure one of guys is trying to kill his character deliberately. In short, a game group that was once a smooth running machine is now a gaming group headed for self-destruction. Like any relationship, gaming groups have their inevitable ups and downs but the secret to a happy and long-lasting group is heeding warning signs before they tear a group apart.

Reasons abound for a game to go astray. Over time, groups evolve and require new challenges. "Hack and slash" might not hold the charm it did back in junior high. Groups may change thanks to the pressures of school, work, or a new bundle of joy. Real life can distract players from the roleplaying. But whatever their source, it's the GM's job to take the lead in identifying problems and trying to fix them.

Before a group dissolves over the frustration of a game that isn't clicking into place, a GM needs take a long, hard look at his group and assess what works and what doesn't. The key to ensuring a long-lived game is early detection of problems and noticing the warning signs before they starting glowing in neon. By recognizing the warning signs, a GM can take action early and hopefully save their group.

The Warning Signs

Everybody Shows Up Late . . . Including You

It's never a good sign when a normally punctual gaming group is now straggling in hours late. This is even worse when it's you -- the GM -- that's late to the game. Sometimes people are just late thanks to traffic or the vagaries of life. But when you notice a recurring pattern of tardiness, you have a problem. If it's just one player that's always late, talk to them individually. But if the whole group is consistently late -- it's time to take action.

Prognosis: *Good.* People are still showing up -- something is working. They've probably just gotten into some bad habits.

Missing Sessions Completely

How many scheduled game sessions actually happen? Is your once-a-week group meeting every other week or even less? It's not a good sign when game sessions are canceled on a regular basis, or if people fail to arrive with little or no warning. Again, every group's standards are different, but cancellation is a significant warning sign.

Prognosis: *Fair.* Canceled game sessions usually indicate this game isn't holding people's interest.

More Time Spent Chatting Than Gaming

When everyone finally shows up, how much time is actually devoted to gaming and how much is devoted to rambling discussions of sci-fi TV shows, bad movies, geeky card games, the best Dr. Who villain, and so on? It's natural for some pre-game chit-chat as everyone arrives, but if you spend more time chatting than actually gaming, you likely

have a problem.

Prognosis: *Good.* Your group enjoys spending time together, they just need to channel their energy into actual gameplay.

Hard Time Staying In Character

Once the game gets rolling, is it constantly interrupted by asides or out of character commentary? Many GMs impose table talk rules, but what happens when *everybody* is talking out of character? Similar to the chatting problem above, the "speaking out of character syndrome" derails a game just when it's starting to gain momentum. This usually means people aren't engaging with the game.

Prognosis: *Good.* Again, usually a sign the group enjoys each other's company, but have trouble focusing on the game.

Players Stop Trying

Being a PC is a tough life with constant threats breathing down your neck. Surviving in a hostile world requires player ingenuity, but sometimes the players just don't seem to be giving 100 percent. If you notice your players aren't trying very hard, you have a problem. People who are tired or distracted by other concerns will have off nights, but that lack of trying can also mean a game is on its last legs.

Prognosis: *Fair.* When players aren't trying, they aren't having any fun and the name of the game is fun.

Character Suicide

It's hard for a player to walk away from a group he's been with for a while. Sometimes, it's a bit easier if his character has an unfortunate "accident" -- something some players will help arrange. If it seems like Fred's trusty Barbarian is taking a lot of ill-considered chances lately -- like charging a dragon armed only with a stick of deodorant -- Fred might be trying to gracefully depart the game. Some characters are created to be played a bit reckless, but if you've noticed a distinct increase in impulsive and dangerous behavior, your players could be giving you a sign.

Prognosis: *Fair.* Players hold their characters dear -- killing them off is a pretty big sign of apathy and dissatisfaction.

Players Are Argumentative Or Fighting

When the yelling starts, the gaming stops. Conflict between characters is a staple of gaming, but it can escalate to genuine conflict between players. That's when a gaming group is in peril. When heated, bitter arguments break out over trivial things, something is seriously amiss in a game. A GM needs to take immediate steps to cool things down. In the heat of the moment, irrevocable damage can be done to a group.

Prognosis: *Poor.* Intense fighting is usually a sign of deep dissatisfaction or personality conflict. This game is in a fight for its life and needs all the help it can get.

Strategies For Saving A Game

Even a troubled gaming group's condition can improve dramatically with the right attention. Some tactics are more drastic than others, so it's usually a good idea to start small and work your way up to the dramatic solutions.

Talk About The Game

Invariably, it helps to sit down as a group and talk things out. You don't need to break out the acoustic guitar and sing

a chorus of Kumbaya, but a frank and open exchange can work wonders. Raise your concerns about the group and see what everyone else has to say. This might feel a bit like leading a group therapy session, but it's worth it. Ask broad questions, looking for honest feedback. Put your ego aside and see what's on people's mind. Be willing to address your own shortcomings. There might be a simple solution to the group's problem. If you need to, talk to one of the players beforehand and have them help you start the discussion with the larger group.

Set a good example

If you've been slacking in your duties as the GM, it's time for the Captain to tighten up the ship. Players take their cues from the GM. A sloppy, disorganized GM who isn't prepared for a game doesn't inspire players. Some GMs have a more free-flowing style than others, but in their hearts, every GM knows when they've put in the necessary effort for a game. If you've been arriving late, make a point to show up on time. Put aside a couple hours before the game to do some focused preparation. Your players will pick up on your cues. Tell everyone politely that you'll be starting the game at 5:00 sharp and you'd appreciate their promptness and see what happens.

Give Everybody A Vacation

Take a week or a month off. Everybody needs a vacation -- even from your favorite hobby. If you can, give enough notice so people can go on actual vacations without the guilt of missing game sessions. Either way, give everyone some time to recharge the gaming batteries and pursue other aspects of life. You might continue meeting, but don't game. Go see a movie or play cards. See if everyone returns to the gaming sessions with renewed vigor. If they do -- problem solved!

Spin An Old Game In A New Direction

If a campaign is feeling a stale, it might be time to change a game's direction. In a long-running campaign, maybe you need to retire Sir Studly the umpteenth level paladin and start playing his neophyte squire. Or transport him to an alternate dimension where the "rules" are different. Identify the genre you're currently playing and imagine where you could take the game. Plan the transition for several sessions. Maybe an action-adventure game becomes a political thriller. A major change in campaign direction is tricky to pull off -- but if you can do it, the game will get a whole new lease on life.

Give Another GM A Shot

Being a GM may be the toughest job you'll ever love, but everyone needs a break. Have your games lost their flair and creativity? A GM with a case of "writer's block" should get one of the other players to try their hand at being the boss. Ideally, one of the players will have the itch to play God. This solution will only work with a willing volunteer, since it's a rare player who can be forced to be a GM and be good at it.

Bring New Blood Into The Group

It may be time to recruit some new blood for your gaming group. A new recruit can shake things up and reinvigorate a stale gaming group. It's often tough for a new gamer to join an established group -- nobody wants to be Cousin Oliver joining the Brady Bunch. So try bringing in two people to help with the "new guy" syndrome. If your group is already teetering on the brink of unmanageability, consider recruiting an "assistant GM" from your established players to run the bad guys and help take some of the load off your shoulders.

Try A New Campaign And Game System

It may be time to scrap your game altogether. Maybe the gang is tired of fighting dragons, and it's time to strap on a PPK and fight eccentric scientists with a marine life and laser fetish. Players may be tired of paper cuts from consulting three separate rule books and seven charts to determine whether they've successfully bashed a stubborn

hobbit. Over time, all players and GMs need to shake up the old habits. Learning a new system for a new game can be an invigorating challenge. GMs should work with players and see what's new that interests them.

Quit And Move On

Call it the "Last Season of Seinfeld Syndrome" -- nothing is worse than a long-running TV show or comic book that goes on a little too long. When everything else fails, it's better to let go of a gaming group than cruelly prolong its life. While it's hard to end a long-standing gaming group, the dynamics of a group can change dramatically with time. People's lives and situations can change and new marriages, babies, jobs, or graduations can signal a fundamental change in the group. Ending a gaming group that isn't working before it's too late may end up saving some friendships in the long run.

All roleplayers know that a good gaming groups is hard to come by. For a GM and players who have a good group that's going through a rocky phase, it's well worth the time and trouble to identify and solve the problem. The quickest route back to nights of carefree dice rolling is spotting the warning signs of a group in trouble and applying the cure early. Like the good doctor said, an ounce of prevention usually beats a pound of cure.

Uwaysi Days, Uwaysi Nights

"Already the teaching of [Tlön's] harmonious history (filled with moving episodes) has wiped out the one which governed in my childhood; already a fictitious past occupies in our memories the place of another, a past of which we know nothing with certainty -- not even that it is false. . . . A scattered dynasty of solitary men has changed the face of the world. Their task continues."

-- Jorge Luis Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"

A history book that creates the history it describes. A secret order of fictional sages that comes within an ace of ruling Central Asia. Immaterial entities gazing out a poet's eyes through the smoke of bhang and frankincense. Again we return to the ever-full wells of India Ultraterrestria, which give the water of life to St. George, and dreams of the telepathic prophet Uways to the faithful. Which faithful didn't exist, at least until after their history was written. Read on, O faithful querent, and more than all shall be revealed.

"How can I write about a man who was praised by the Prophet who said: the fragrance of the Merciful comes from the side of Yemen, where Uways lived; and on the Day of Resurrection, Allah will create seventy thousand angels looking like Uways to bring Uways to the celestial sphere. They will bring him to Paradise and no one would know which one is the Uways . . ."

-- Farideddin Attar, *Memorial of the Friends* (1221)

Uways al-Qarani plays an interesting role in the earliest years of Islamic mysticism. Uways believed in the Prophet Muhammad despite never having seen or heard him, and later the caliph Umar made Uways his intercessor with Allah based on a cryptic saying of Muhammad's. Uways had a mania for secrecy, staying well away from court and eventually dying in battle alongside the Prophet's son-in-law Ali in 657 A.D. Uways first appears in writing, however, in the 830s, and the stories get wilder and wilder the longer they go on. Uways had miraculously recovered from leprosy except for one dead spot; Uways channelled part of the Koran without ever hearing it; Uways knew people's names without meeting them; Uways had actually died and been reborn mad; Uways was able to appear in dreams to later scholars; Uways was in telepathic communion with the Prophet himself, or with Allah. Travelling Sufis and other ecstatic mystics from the 13th century onward occasionally identified themselves as "Uwaysis," indicating that they had no formal master since, like Uways, they could obtain instruction by supernatural means. Like Uways himself, the Uwaysis were strange and eldritch, existing in borderlands and among the mad and the wanderers.

"But it is not only oral legend which corresponds to the History of the Uwaysis, but reality itself."

-- Julian Baldick, *Imaginary Muslims*

Or so it seemed. Around 1600, a Turkish Sufi scholar named Ahmad Uzgani ("of Uzgen"), living in what is now Kyrgyzstan, wrote (in Persian) the *Tadkhira-yi Uwaysiyya*, the *History of the Uwaysis* in which he not only set forth the blueprint for Uwaysi mysticism but revealed a continuous line of Uwaysi scholars, sages, mystics, kings, and leaders going back to the time of Muhammad himself. The Uwaysi movement was actually a secret lineage which could contact the spirits of its own deceased masters for guidance, initiation, and advice. Under an exalted ruler, the *Qutb*, or Pole, this brotherhood served as the living link between the visible world and the world of the spirits. The secret Uwaysi hierarchy channelled the *rijal al-ghayb*, or "men of the unseen" telepathically and moved at miraculous speed between secret cult centers in Ceylon, Lebanon, Medina, and the high plateaus of Central Asia. From these fastnesses spread an overt Uwaysi order, which flourished throughout Eastern Turkestan as the advisers to the khans until a sometime rival Sufi path, the Naqshbandis, drove the Uwaysis back underground after seizing control of the government of Kashgar. The Uwaysis (or "Üveysis") became the official Sufi sect of the Ottoman Empire, and attracted the patronage of the Pahlavi shahs of Iran until 1979 and the revolution, but always the final step to power eluded them.

Which makes it all the more interesting that the history in the *History of the Uwaysis* was almost entirely imaginary. Only a few of the figures featured in it existed at all; other great heroes such as the Kara-Khanid Satuq Bughra Khan were retroactively initiated through convenient visions given by the men of the unseen. However, Uzgani's seamless blending and almost kabbalistic parallelism of the Kyrgyz, Turkish, Persian, Mongol, and Islamic legends created a

pattern so convincing that the "Uwaysi" order emerged just as Uzgani had claimed it would, and had. Uzgani had created a history for his sect, and for his people, that retroactively became true -- later Uwaysis reported that yes, the visions Uzgani had written down could easily be confirmed using the techniques he had made up -- or revealed. Western travelers, from Ignatius Moreaga d'Ohsonn in 1791 to Arminius Vambery in 1863, reported widespread Uwaysi brotherhoods in places like Yemen, where Kyrgyz histories would be somewhat thinner on the ground.

*"My soul is from elsewhere, I'm sure of that,
And I intend to end up there. . . .
I'm like a bird from another continent, sitting in this aviary.
The day is coming when I fly off,
But who is it now in my ear who hears my voice?
Who says words with my mouth?
Who looks out with my eyes?"*
-- Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273)

Which, of course, leaves the ticklishly interesting notion that Uzgani wasn't making things up at all, but rather reporting the inner truth on the orders from the Poles (there are four of them, one for each corner of the world) and the men of the unseen. In fact, these men of the unseen seem uncannily like the Mahatmas of Theosophy, or even moreso the "walk-ins" beloved of modern New Age believers such as Ruth Montgomery. The various masters of the *History of the Uwaysis* are explicitly described as "standing on" or "on the back of" previous prophets and sages (such as Job, Noah, Jesus, Husayn, and so forth). Did Uzgani serve an immortal lineage of such ascended masters or discorporate beings, continuously reborn into the Uwaysi sect? Is this the meaning of the Sufi poet Rumi's question, "Who looks out with my eyes?" Is it why the Uwaysis often refer to their elect as the *abdal*, or "substitutes"? Rumi, of course, composed his poetry in ecstatic communion with the spirit world -- who said words with his mouth?

"And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it."
-- Genesis 28:10-12

To the Uwaysis, there's no question at all. Of course the secret masters are discorporate entities, alternately reborn as *abdal* or dwelling in the *alam al-ghayb*, the "world of the unseen" and waiting to speak to their followers in ecstatic communion. Even orthodox Islam accepts (if it doesn't exactly encourage) the *istikhara*, sleeping on a holy spot (such as a well or rock) to gain a dream-vision of the Prophet or some other holy figure. The Uwaysis merely perfect and formalize the practice, which descends not only from Jacob and the Biblical prophets but from the "incubation" of the mystery cult of Asklepios. Hundreds of testaments exist to patients sleeping in Asklepios' dream temples, receiving diagnoses from the god, and recovering upon following the instructions. Incubation and *istikhara* sound considerably better, at any rate, than seeing Grey alien abductors or night-hags in your dreams, as the godless West has a habit of doing nowadays.

"And Moses said unto Khidr: 'Shall I follow you so that you may teach me of what you have been taught of right knowledge?' He said: 'Surely, you will not be able to bear with me patiently. And how should you bear patiently that which you have never encompassed in your knowledge?' He said: 'Allah so wills, you will find me patient, and I shall not disobey you in any matter.' He said: 'Then if you follow me, question me not on any thing until I myself mention of it to you.'"
-- The Koran, Sura 18:66-70

Although you might wind up seeing Khidr, the "Verdant One" of Islamic legend. A trickster figure fond of paradox, Khidr is an immortal prophet who found the Fountain of Youth while on the march with Alexander the Great in -- Kyrgyzstan. After drinking the water, Khidr became suffused with a green glow, which we've seen open dimensional doors from [Philadelphia](#) to [Tibet](#). Khidr also learned secrets Allah revealed to no one else, and in some texts, seems to threaten Allah with them. Khidr also taught Moses, and is identified by some Indian sects with the unknown god of Kataragama, or [Dionysos](#) (nine and six centuries before Alexander, respectively). Like the Uwaysi order he patronizes

-- Khidr shows up more often than any other figure in the *History of the Uwaysis*, and instructs more than half of the 50 secret masters mentioned -- Khidr apparently feels unrestricted by conventional chronology. Islamic lore identifies Khidr with the prophet Elijah (another [immortal wanderer](#)), with St. George of all people (another Green Man with the same feast day, April 23), and with [Enoch](#) (another recipient of pure divine Wisdom). In North Indian Islam, Khidr is unsurprisingly identified with cannabis and other narcotics -- a Green Man opening doors to the spirit realm will get that on occasion. On the other end of the Uwaysi beat, frankincense, another herb gods enjoy, grows in Uways' old grounds in Yemen -- from which Muhammad could smell the "fragrance of the Merciful." The breath of Khidr? Or the wind from the door to the spirit realm?

"Perhaps the single most startling discovery made by the team was the Sufi attitude to telepathy. Sufic telepathic powers are used on a world-wide scale in such a way as to discredit the idea that telepathy is possible."
-- Ernest Scott, *The People of the Secret*

If so, it's a door that the Uwaysi Sufis want to keep their pole position in for as long as possible, while extending their order of the unseen hither, elsewhere, and yon. The Khidr order of Sufism has a "salutation to the cupbearer" as its slogan, the wine-cup ([green grail](#)?) being Dionysos' emblem. The "Order of Khidr," would thusly, of course, also be the "Order of St. George" -- which is, as it happens, the formal name of the Order of the Garter. There is undoubtedly some connection between the "Garter" of the Order, the Sufi mystical "tie" or bond, the Green Man of the Order, and the delightful notion in Margaret Murray's *God of the Witches* that the Order of the Garter was, in fact, founded as a covert coven of Horned God-worshipping witches! That Horned God, no doubt, being Alexander Dulkharnein ("the Two-Horned") come round again at last to check up on things and try to get a swig of immortality elixir.

This extends our Uwaysi fraternity (or an Alexandrian heretical sect of it) into Britain, no doubt brought back with the crusading Templars along with [Baphomet](#), Morris dances, and griffin eggs. The [griffins](#), as we have already learned, make trans-dimensional war against their ancient masters the Lemurians, mayhap in league with the Christian rival to (cousin of?) Khidr, [Prester John](#). The notion of Prester John's Templars, Khidr's Uwaysis, and the Lemurians fighting a three-cornered astral battle for control of India Ultraterrestria, using forged histories, legendary walk-ins, and ecstatic visions as their weapons, seems nigh-irresistible. The *History of the Uwaysis* might simply be a magical text like the Rosicrucian manifestoes, or it might be the operating manual for the [reality quake](#) that shook the Uwaysis into the corners of history and the Islamic world, wrecking the Lemurian frankincense depot at [Irem](#) in the aftershock, and throwing Prester John clear to Ethiopia. Why don't we all sleep on it, and find out for sure?

Pyramid Review

Prophecies of the Dragon (for The Wheel of Time RPG)



Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Aaron Acevedo, Evan Jamieson, Michelle Lyons, James Maliszewski, Charles Ryan, and Paul Sudlow

\$29.95

Wizards of the Coast's *Prophecies of the Dragon* is the only scheduled release supporting their *Wheel of Time* license. More a campaign than an adventure, this supplement is designed to take 1st level characters to 6th level while making them feel like a part of the grand sweep of events depicted in Robert Jordan's books. A four-page appendix provides a few new weaves, the Seachan background, a new feat, and some guidelines for handling multiclass channelers. A handful of new monsters and a host of NPCs are detailed throughout the text, providing DMs with a host of opponents for their players. Created with fans of Jordan's novels in mind, *Prophecies of the Dragon* is a must for those who love *The Wheel of Time Roleplaying Game* and want to run adventures set in the world of the Dragon Reborn. Fans of the *d20* system who are looking for new adventures may wish to look elsewhere, unless their game world is very similar to Jordan's world.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The creators of *Prophecies of the Dragon* did an excellent job of incorporating the feel of Jordan's books into these linked adventures. The players, who can come fresh from the "What Follows in Shadow" adventure from the back of the main rulebook, will find themselves enmeshed in the plots of the Aes Sedai, Black Ajah, Children of Light, and any number of Darkfiends. These plots manage to buffet and involve the player characters without necessarily leaving them feeling railroaded. The adventures are also written so as to involve the player characters in the events detailed in the *Wheel of Time* novels without making them feel like mere observers of events. Indeed, by the end of the campaign, the player characters will be participating in actions that directly involve the safety of Rand al'Thor himself. Most importantly, the heroes are always matched with worthy opponents throughout the course of the adventures. If these adventures have a weakness, it is that these opponents might, on occasion, be more than some parties can handle. As such, you may wish to occasionally remind your players that discretion is sometimes the better part of valor and that always thinking with their sword arms is likely to get them into a great deal of trouble.

The adventures themselves are a good mix of wilderness encounters, urban intrigue, and good old-fashioned dungeon crawls. There are also a handful of mini-adventures provided to be inserted almost anywhere in the campaign to beef up characters and change the pace when needed.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The layout and artwork of *Prophecies of the Dragon*, like most of Wizard of the Coast's recent releases, is very good. In particular, *Prophecies of the Dragon* makes excellent use of sidebars to detail artifacts, events, motivations, and strategies that would otherwise interrupt the flow of the text. The maps are similar to those in the *Wheel of Time Roleplaying Game*. The local maps are excellent and informative. Indeed, the presentation of some smaller villages in 3/4 profile is a nice touch. The larger maps, which are used to give the DM a view of a large city or major battle, are more there for impressions than to provide detailed information.

Jordan's world is, in the end, the great strength and weakness of *Prophecies of the Dragon*. If you like his world, you will like these adventures. If you dislike the world, this book is not for you. The most common criticism leveled at his books -- that nothing happens in a lot of pages -- does not apply to the adventures as they are written. Whether or not that applies to your game will have more to do with your players than any adventure. What this adventure does have is a lot of the Byzantine plots and manipulative characters that are seemingly omnipresent in Jordan's novels.

If you like this world, *Prophecies of the Dragon* is a worthwhile purchase. Although the \$29.95 price tag is a little steep, the adventures provided are well detailed and will provide you with more than enough for a standard-length campaign. Those uninterested in Robert Jordan's world should avoid *Prophecies of the Dragon* and find their next gaming fix elsewhere.

--*Matthew M. DeForrest*

Pyramid Review

GURPS Prime Directive Core Rulebook

Published by [Amarillo Design Bureau, Inc.](#)

Compiled by Gary Plana

Additional material by Stephen V. Cole and Alex Chobot

Edited by Stephen P. Petrick and Leanna M. Cole

176 b&w pages; \$24.95

The "Powered by *GURPS*" label has pulled the *Prime Directive* roleplaying game, first published in 1993, out of the mothballs for another swing at the RPG market. Amarillo Design Bureau, Inc. takes advantage of some of the rules from *GURPS Basic Set* and its Compendia to recreate the Star Fleet Universe.

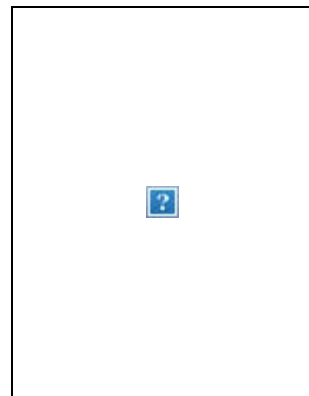
For those not familiar with ADB's game lines, it is the publishers of *Star Fleet Battles* and *Federation & Empire*, a tactical starship game and a galactic strategy game respectively. Like those titles, *GURPS Prime Directive* is loosely based on the original *Star Trek* TV series, but since there were only three seasons, a lot of the holes in the narrative were filled with creative license, guesswork, and ingenuity.

The history they've built up strongly resembles the source material, but while they shake hands, ne'er do the twain quite meet. Ambitious Earthlings met with the cool and aloof Vulcans long ago, and this was to lead to the formation of the United Federation of Planets. The Klingons have escaped from a long exile on their own planet, regained warp technologies, and now occupy a lot of territory filled with many subject and conquered peoples. The Humans are still headstrong, the Vulcans still unemotional, and the Klingons still aching for an honorable fight, but there many similarities end. Granted, you'll find most of the familiar faces -- the Tholians, Romulans, and Andorians -- but since the setting is born mostly of complex war games, a lot of the backstory deals with alliances, betrayals, and endless wars and skirmishes. Much of the material reads like it was intended as a *Star Fleet Battles* scenario.

The timeline helps to put things in perspective, but it, too, swings toward the military interests of the setting. It starts with a little bit of early history for the galaxy, takes you past the birth of the major powers, and leaves off about 225 years after the Human-Vulcan meeting (so no, no *Enterprise* or *Next Generation* material here, if you were wondering -- the license probably doesn't cover them).

The book is self-contained, for the most part; a lot of *GURPS Basic Set* material is included, including action resolution, adventuring (radiation, illness, gravity), advantages, disadvantages, and quirks. The psionic system is a little different -- psionics is a rare phenomenon -- so for now players are limited to mind shield, telekinesis, telepathy, mind meld, nerve pinch, meditation, and suggestion. Power levels are discarded and the abilities are all skills. The encapsulated *GURPS* material takes up a little over one-quarter of the book and does not include the space combat system from *GURPS Space, Third Edition*.

There are rules for changing between *GURPS Space* and *Star Fleet Battles*, so Space 3e is a necessity if you're not going to learn to (or bother to) mix it up in Amarillo Design's tactical wargame. Whichever way the information flows in your group, the rules they offer are nicely done; you can take *GURPS* onto the board or bring the tactics of the board into your roleplaying without too many math headaches. Weapons and technology from *Star Fleet Battles* are given *GURPS*-appropriate rules and stats so you can fire off wild weasels and plasma torpedoes, while crewmembers



and their skill levels give relative bonuses or minuses in the board game. Legendary figures even have their own character templates so you know if your PC qualifies for special consideration in the scenario.

GURPS Prime Directive also has racial templates for all the major (and many of the minor) races of the galaxy, and professional templates for the really important positions. The templates are especially useful when creating Prime Teams. These are groups of individuals with various skills, thrust together and trained to handle various crises. They're a little like the more familiar "away teams" (and may be called upon for such duties) except they're usually called upon for more . . . indelicate missions. They may be rescuers or assassins, or they may be brought in to deal with medical emergencies following a natural disaster. Each race or empire has their own version of such a team, but while the organization and duties of these mirrors may be slightly different, they all serve the same basic function in getting the game rolling.

When you come home from an away mission, there's a chapter on rewards. There's one page on giving out bonus, reputation, and seniority points, which determine your character advancement, how famous you are in the galaxy, and whether you're eligible for promotion. Then there's another eight on the medals and awards they offer. It's a clever means of exposition, because it drops hints about how one might get a medal or the sorts of missions you can expect to go on . . . but eight pages? The technology chapter only runs a dozen, and space is at a premium in any standalone product.

The technology section is about what you'd expect, with a good rundown of transporters, phasers, disruptors, tricorders, and warp engines, but more importantly it lists who has what and when they have it. No matter which race you use or what time period you play in, you'll know if or when that faction has warp technology or those irritating cloaking devices.

The graphic design is nice -- nothing spectacular, but the text is clear and legible, avoiding the temptation some licensed or self-contained games have to use tiny print so they can jam every conceivable bit of info into the space allotted. The artwork ranges from rough to out-and-out cartoonish, which is a bit of a letdown from the fine artwork of the original volume; perhaps they haven't the rights to the older work, but it would have been worth tracking down (it *is* a beautiful cover, though). The text is far too chummy in places, leading to awkward constructions and a lack of focus or direction. The division of the rules isn't the same as ***GURPS Basic Set*** (though the text often is, with minor tweaks), which is sometimes good and sometimes baffling. GMs beware: The sample adventure in the back of the book is the same adventure being experienced by the characters in the opening narrative at the front of the book.

It does have its good points. Though they dwell on the strangest topics, they don't waste much time or space on any one subject, and are direct about how their universe works. ("Star Fleet is a military organization, straight up, and humans are in charge.") Most of the confusing words have a pronunciation guide, a concession too many designers take for granted.

All in all, ***GURPS Prime Directive*** cannot seem to divest itself from its war-gaming roots, even though it claims many of its origins in early fan attempts at *Star Trek* roleplaying homebrews. The first version had all of three pages of GMing advice, three more than this one has. The information provided on all things military makes it an ideal setting for a war- or soldiery-based *Star Trek/Star Fleet Battles* roleplaying game, but the dearth of how-tos on building worlds, creating adventures, bringing three-dimensional NPCs to life, or adding any of the color or drama of discovery and exploration means that a sightseeing tour will get beat out by a tour of duty every time.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Pick

Napoleon in Europe

Published by [Eagle Games](#)

Designed by Glen Drover

Illustrated by Paul E. Niemeyer, Keith Rocco and Adrian George

\$59.99

For its third title, Eagle Games turn to another classic subject -- that of the Age of Napoleon and the wars fought in Europe between 1796 and 1815. Designed for two to seven players, *Napoleon in Europe* lets players take on the roles of the great nations -- France, Great Britain, Austria, Spain, Prussia, Russia and the Ottoman Empire -- and attempt to contain the ambitions of France under Bonaparte or be the power to dominate the continent. The basic game can be played in about an hour, but as the complexity of the rules and scenarios increases so does the playing time, and you might want to set aside a good afternoon or so to play the whole historical campaign with all seven nations participating. At such an advanced level, *Napoleon in Europe* can be best described as a strategic game on a grand scale, with surprising tactical detail to the individual battles. Even in basic and standard play, these elements are highly evident.

Like *The American Civil War* and *War! Age of Imperialism* before it, *Napoleon in Europe* comes stuffed to the gills with goodies. Inside the box, the purchaser will find . . .

- 564 of plastic miniatures, representing the artillery, cavalry, infantry and leaders of the armies of the period created in soft, durable plastic in HO or 1/72nd scale, meaning that they could easily be replaced with 15mm scale metal miniatures if so desired. This would allow more detailed figures and also a better depiction of the various troop types in the standard and advanced versions of *Napoleon in Europe*. Those provided are quite colorful; red represents Great Britain, blue France, purple Prussia, green Russia, tan Ottoman Empire, gray Austria, and yellow for Spain. One problem is that the tan of the Ottoman Empire and gray of Austria are too similar -- another color such as orange could have been used instead.
- A huge 46-inch by 36-inch game board, that comes in three foldout segments and depicts Europe during the reign of Napoleon as far south as the coast of North Africa. This is a gorgeous map by Paul E. Niemeyer, designed to look like the very maps the generals of the time would have used.
- A set of 180 full-color counters used to mark conquered and controlled regions, to differ between various troop types and naval squadrons.
- A set of four six-sided dice.
- A deck of 90 cards that introduce random events, technical innovations and other effects.
- A Battleboard upon which battles are fought out in the standard and advanced game.
- An 80-page full color rulebook detailing the basic, standard and advanced game sets.
- A pair of Reference/Tracking cards.

. . . all of which fits tidily into the box, but without any method of storage. This is a particular problem for both the miniatures and the counters, forcing the purchaser to find their own method of storage, such as using ziplock bags. Before any game can be played, the miniatures need to be removed from the spurs and artillery pieces assembled, and all of it sorted. Thankfully the preparation work only needs to be done once, bar the placing of cavalymen and leaders upon horses.

The introduction and basic game is covered in the first 20 pages of the rulebook, of which seven details a full battle. It



takes about ten minutes to read through and start playing in what is, at this level, essentially an advanced game of **Risk**. Opponents march their troops across Europe, attempting to capture the homeland regions and capital of their opponents. If two forces clash within a region, battle ensues, which is played on the battleboard. The opposing forces are set up in secret -- a screen must be provided to do this -- and then revealed. Both sides can maneuver between the front and rear lines, though only artillery can engage from the rear, until such times as one side's forces are pushed into the rear and are forced to retreat. Each attack is conducted by rolling dice for each unit -- one for infantry, three for cavalry and leaders, four for artillery in the frontline, and two if in the rear lines. If any die comes up a six, then an opponent is sent forced back where it may be rallied if there is a leader present, or destroyed if not. While cards are gained at levels of **Napoleon in Europe** for winning major battles -- engagements between armies of six or more units -- and for territory held, in the basic game they are only used to buy yet more reinforcements, with players needing to get the right suits of symbols to receive regiment, brigade, or corps level units. Again, this is similar to **Risk**, and the basic game could very easily be the next step up from that classic, serving as an excellent introduction to board wargaming. The basic game presents multiple methods of set up: players may start with an equal number of troops, or play something more historical, like playing a set number of turns or to total annihilation; finally, everyone can gang up on a very powerful France.

The standard rules add more unit types (elite infantry, militia, irregular, and heavy cavalry), allowing access to the scenarios at the back of the book and including more detailed rules for the diplomacy and politics of the era and the production of units. Players must also attempt to attain victory conditions ranging from total to minor. Great Britain has slightly different victory conditions throughout to reflect the fact that she was a proponent of the "Balance of Power" and did not want one nation to dominate Europe. Naval rules are far more detailed, allowing engagements at sea and blockades to be made and broken, with Britain having the advantage there in term of navy size and quality, but limited to buying more ships than land units to reflect the importance of her navy. For regions and capitals held at the end of every three turns, each nation receives production points that can be spent on buying new units and Political Action Points, which represent their influence within Europe. Once a player has accumulated enough of these, they can be spent to conduct diplomacy, from making Diplomatic Overtures to change the relationship between nations, annexing or liberating a region, suing for peace, causing an uprising, declaring or breaking an alliance, and declaring war or an armistice. Without Political Action Points, none of these actions can be conducted, but they can also be gained for winning battles.

Tactical battles make use of the full Battleboard, with each side having a Battle Area, a Reserve Area, and a Retreat Area. Between them is the Middle Area where the clashes will take place. In a skirmish, there is just the one front between the sides, but with a major battle, opponents face each other across three flanks. Two dice are rolled to determine the effect of fire upon a defending unit, with high rolls necessary. Cavalry can make charges and infantry can respond by forming squares. Battles are more complex and difficult to win, but do get across the feel of Napoleonic tactics. As in the basic game, a full battle is explained with very clear illustrations.

Finally, the advanced rules add light infantry and horse artillery, battlefield terrain, the difficulties of invading both Spain and Russia, and allows for cavalry counter charges and greater involvement by neutral nations such as Portugal, Holland, and Sweden. A single French leader unit can be designated Napoleon Bonaparte himself as well.

A major addition is the introduction of full card play into **Napoleon in Europe**. In the previous rule set, only the symbols on the card were important, but now they are ignored instead of the text. *Random* cards take immediate effect after a player has drawn them: "Garrison Duty!" causes the loss of an infantry unit, "Shortage of Horses for the Dragoons!" turns a single cavalry unit into infantry, and the traditional "Storms at Sea!" sends all of a player's naval squadrons scurrying into their nearest home ports. *Effect* cards are held until the right moment when a player decides to use them. They include the disastrous "U.S. declares war on Great Britain!" that forces Britain to lose two naval squadrons and three infantry units when she assigns them elsewhere; likewise France loses two Political Action Points when "The Continental System Fails!" is played. Finally, the *Innovations* cards allow a nation to improve their forces, status or methods of production, but cannot be brought into play until 10 production points have been spent. In the historical scenarios, the appropriate Innovations Cards are assigned to the nation that gains them in a particular year. The cards include the French "Corps d'Armee System," introduced in 1805, that enables reinforcements to join their armies engaged in battle in an adjacent region. France also gains "Nationalism" in 1796, which improves their rally rolls, but Britain gains this in 1800, Prussia in 1813, and Russia gains an even greater bonus in 1812. Infantry charges

are more effective with "Tactical Flexibility," gained by France in 1805, Austria 1809, Britain 1810, and Prussia 1813.

There are 10 scenarios covering the Napoleonic Wars from 1796 and the French invasion of Italy under Napoleon, through his defeat of Austria in 1805 and their revenge in 1809, his disastrous invasion of Russia in 1812 and final defeat at Waterloo in 1815. The final scenario asks the question what if the settlement of Congress of Vienna did not lead to peace for a century, but the rivalries it fostered broke out into war in 1820 rather than in 1914? The rules are rounded out with an interesting set of designer's notes and suggestions for substituting the figures in the game with those from other manufacturers.

For obvious reasons, *Napoleon in Europe* has more resonance with me as a citizen of the United Kingdom than the company's *The American Civil War*. Although I'm no Napoleonic scholar, the game feels right and contains a very solid mix of diplomacy and military campaigning. The components are decent and give the game a tactile quality and an appealing look. Though the size of the board is quite large, it imparts a grand sweep and a sense of history. Once battles are joined, the Battleboard forces the players to think tactically rather than strategically, especially in the standard game. *Napoleon in Europe* should serve as an excellent introduction to anyone wanting to get into wargaming and wants something complete and is not expandable. More experienced players will want to dive straight into the standard rules, where they will find a still challenging game.

--Matthew Pook

(with thanks to Roj at Wayland's Forge)

Real Power Is Making Two Months Moot

For those of you just joining us, we've been talking about character power levels for the past geological epoch or so. Here's where I try to wrap up the whole kit & caboodle into something that makes it look like the whole series *hasn't* been moot.

There are certain gaming books -- or at the very least passages therein -- that do a lot to shake up the mental ant farm and send those little thoughts a'scurrying. (Okay; those kind of revelations *do* come from sources other than gaming books . . . but this being a gaming magazine and all, I don't think there's terribly much interest in my revealing how a cookbook affected my view of all things culinary.)

Anyway, one such passage was contained within the 1983 book *Wizards*, one of Mayfair's Role Aids line of unofficial support for the (*Advanced*) *Dungeons & Dragons* game. (I note with some irony that the act of publishing unofficial support that caused Mayfair to be sued by TSR many years ago would today be merely another case of *d20* publishing. Clearly being 20 years ahead of the times isn't a good thing if the place you're standing was on fire 20 years ago.) Now, at the time the existence of a roleplaying book that *wasn't* published by TSR would have been thought-provoking enough (at least to my pre-teen brain). But the section on Aahz and Skeeve, based on the *Myth* series of humorous fantasy novels -- with the introduction written by Robert Lynn Asprin himself -- was an eye-opener. In it he talks about (surprise!) character power levels, and what to do about them.

He points out the dangers of making characters too powerful, and instead discusses the technique he uses in the *Myth* series, which is to start characters at a low power level and keep them low. He writes, "If [Skeeve] can figure out how to use his 'Light Fires' spell to convert normal arrows into flaming bits of disaster, does he really have to learn a 'Fireball' spell?"

The entire section is worth reading, if you can track the book down. (Heck, the entire book is one of my collection favorites, although that may be the nostalgia talking.)

Anyway, this observation combined with another one from the world of computer and console gaming. See, I'll be watching my friends play console RPGs (generally as I harass them about when they're going to save the dang game and get going with *Talisman*) and -- since they're almost always in the middle of the storyline -- I'll see a combat sequence that looks not unlike:

```
RINKIN [Level 57] casts Flaming Vengeful Fist of Gaia!  
Undead Lord takes 817 points of damage!  
Undead Lord takes 904 points of damage!  
Undead Lord takes 502 points of damage!  
Undead Lord takes 817 points of damage!
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JESIE [Level 59] attacks Undead Lord with bare hands!  
Undead Lord takes 1841 points of damage!  
Undead Lord dies!
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Undead Lord attacks RINKIN with Garden Weasel!  
RINKIN takes 149 points of damage!
```

And so on.

Now, the interesting thing about these console games is that, generally, the pace and feel of combat doesn't vary wildly from battle to battle. Within the first minutes of the game you may see:

```
RINKIN [Level 1] casts Moot Flame!  
Plush Zombie takes 2 points of damage!  
Plush Zombie takes 5 points of damage!  
Plush Zombie takes 3 points of damage!  
Plush Zombie takes 2 points of damage!
```

And the final battle may look like:

RINKIN [Level 257] casts Everything's On Fire!
Really Really Really Really Really Big Bad Undead Thing That Doesn't Floss takes 99,999 points of damage!

Really Really Really Really Really Big Bad Undead Thing That Doesn't Floss looks at **RINKIN** for 27,921 points of damage!

And most combats (with some exceptions) will generally take a few minutes each.

In other words, the designers of these games generally decide to make all challenges of a level [roughly equal](#) to the characters fighting.

In that way, in many ways character power level doesn't matter, so much as the level of:

1. The world they will interact with, and
2. The opposition they will face.

The second point deals with combat, and the first point deals with . . . well, everything else. As such, the first point is really what we've been talking about for the past couple of months; if you have the power of a god, how does your world react to you? If you are a squirrel in a world of humans, how does the world react to you?

The second point is pretty much up to the whim of the GM; no matter how powerful your character are, if the GM wants you to encounter someone *more* powerful, they will.

Now, since most console games don't have any detailed interaction beyond combat, the truth of the matter is that it really doesn't matter *what* the power level is; generally speaking, the power level of any opposition will be equal to your own, plus or minus a smidge.

In fact, since the whole point of a roleplaying game is a shared reality between willing participants, than all the advice we've discussed really doesn't matter, if everyone agrees to it. (Don't you love long, drawn-out essays or other writings where the point of the whole blamed thing is that whatever they've been saying is pointless?) If everyone is playing a "highly skilled" campaign, but the GM would like to interject a "gods among men" scenario into the setting, then he only needs to include an adventure where the heroes wildly overpower the opposition, like the *Star Trek* story where the *Enterprise* was "attacked" by incredibly weak aliens, and the crew goes along with it to try to determine what's going on. If you're playing a "gods among men" campaign, but want truly human-level interaction, then either find a way to depower the heroes, transport them to a place where their powers don't matter (or they are among equals), or expose them to a scenario where their vast powers won't help. (A recent issue of *Superman* revolved entirely around Clark Kent trying to determine what happened to a newsstand operator he casually knew; the story, its challenges, and interactions were touchingly human.)

Anyway, like so much advice and so many observations, these are not gospel; take this advice and jump from there, adding to it, modifying it, or ignoring it altogether. Don't be afraid to try something different, experiment, or otherwise shake the ant farm.

Since, as ever, the whole *point* of gaming is to have fun . . . regardless of how powerful the characters are.

* * *

As a reminder, I'm out of town as of . . . um . . . now for the World Yo-Yo Contest. I should hopefully be back on Monday. If anything catches fire, please save marshmallows until then.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: Amber Diceless Role-Playing

(Two stars) ". . .[T]he CloneMasters acquired a new breed of enforcer, capable of killing a disobedient serf with a single, merciless blow. This elite force called itself 'Janizaries,' but when the citizens spat their names in private, they called their new tormentors 'Jellies.'"

Dork Tower!



Click the graphic below to download a printable PDF file of Igor's playing piece!



Dork Tower!



Designer's Notes: GURPS WWII: Iron Cross

by Gene Seabolt

First things first: I promise I won't bore you with a "Making of *Iron Cross*" documentary as I did with the *GURPS WWII* designer's notes. As the first full-sized supplement in the *WWII* line, *Iron Cross* shares the corebook's development backstory, with nary a thing to add to it. (For those who *are* interested in the development of this line, see "Designer's Notes: *GURPS World War II*" in the archives. It has an official 3.43 approval rating and an unofficial 9.8 snooze rating. We're reserving the 10.0 rating for the long-anticipated *Quarterly Royalty Report Designer's Notes* article.)

I can even get the obligatory "thank you" out of the way in good time: Hans-Christian Vortisch, thank you. It *is* a little bit alarming when Hans dredges up firearms overlooked by every other historian of men putting holes in other men. But I cannot overly advertise the value he added to *Iron Cross* with his research. The playtesters caught many a serious error and added many an appreciated insight, of course. Steve paid the bills and paved the way, as always. But Hans . . . well, there aren't all that many people in this world who can school *me* on the technical merits of the Nebelwerfer.

Oh, and one last thing to get said and done up front: Nazism was all an immense shame that plunged well below the level of crying. *Iron Cross* does its job as a roleplaying resource. It treats the Nazis and their soldiers as the human beings they were, and it even provides enough background to step into the skin of a Nazi who gets up in the morning and feels good about himself. Don't anyone confuse that with approval, please.

Hey, You're Boring Us Again!

So I probably am. As we all know, we're here for the outtakes, the good stuff that didn't quite fit into the printed product. I never actually have outtakes, but I thought I'd take this opportunity to address two frequent concerns with the *WWII* line in general and *Iron Cross* in particular. Those are:

1. Combat-based roleplaying rapidly becomes boring.
2. The Germans are only really suitable as bad guys.

To which I would respond:

1. Yes, it certainly can.
2. Do they sell more Luke Skywalker or Darth Vader masks when Halloween rolls around?

As I've discussed before, a key to military campaigns is to stress the between-the-bullets moments. It's essential to provide actual roleplaying opportunities for which the intense battle sequences serve as mere punctuation. After a while, gun-bunny roleplayers discover what real combat veterans discover: It's all a roll of the dice. (In this case, literally.) There's only so much adventure to be mined from determining who shoots whom first, particularly if the situation is handled realistically, such that the PCs should paraphrase one of Bill Mauldin's characters in observing that, "I feel like a fugitive from the law of averages." I don't know whether Joe or Willie said it -- I don't know that Mauldin ever pointed out which one was Joe and which one was Willie -- but it applies as much to the guy with Rifle-15 attempting to roll an 8 or less as it did to the real troops of the era.

As for the taint associated with WWII Germany, an open-minded GM can turn that into fuel for good drama. Whether his players want to portray unwilling draftees expressing horror at the war, or even devout Nazis, it should be easy to provide them a moral landscape as littered with mines as any battlefield. The GM doesn't have to bludgeon his players with a scenario based upon, "You're obviously serving an evil regime and should rebel immediately no matter how suicidal that is." From the most extreme perspective, we *all* perform little evils to continue existing -- even vegetarians eat formerly living things -- and the inventive GM can begin worming his way through the relativism inherent in

survival scenarios . . . such as being a little fish in a Nazi pond. This will, of course, require some suspension of belief on the part of the players, who know what the final verdict on Nazi Germany will be where their characters did not.

The following sketch of a campaign arc illustrates one approach to working with these elements.

Gene's Uber German Campaign

I would start the players out as ordinary grunts in the Wehrmacht, polling them secretly as to their preference in arm of service (paratroops, line infantry, engineers, armor, cavalry, etc.). The majority would rule, though I wouldn't bother telling those who wanted something different how the conclusion was reached. A lot of guys wanted to be clerks and ended up clearing mine, instead. It's in genre not to explain *why* things didn't work out.

I'd allow, even encourage, civilian dependents at a frequency of 6 or less. As the GM, I'll be able to use them.

Certainly, the characters do not have to be enthusiastic about their lot in their feldgrau life. Secret Communist sympathizers, discreet traces of Gypsy blood, other Secrets . . . it's all good. But I wouldn't blink if one or more players wanted to try their hand at a good Nazi, either, as long as I was comfortable that we weren't brushing into fetish territory.

I might begin with just one session set at boot camp, during which an NPC would be killed during a particularly realistic exercise, simply as a bit of foreshadowing.

Poland

The campaign proper would begin with the hustle and bustle of Poland: gray trucks jammed bumper to bumper on dust-choked lanes, infantry marching as fast as they can in the adjacent fields, supplies not always keeping up with the advance. No actual fighting, other than the verbal sort if I decide the PCs have to hunt down lunch.

The overall mood would be of overwhelming victory -- with reports of the panzers at the front of the line tearing through the Polish ranks, but if my PCs are infantry, a few days into the campaign I would assign them to knock out a Polish strongpoint that the tanks had bypassed days earlier. Then I would turn this into an unexpectedly bloody affair. It would help illustrate some of the costs of blitzkrieg that Hitler concealed -- the panzers got all the publicity, but the infantry had to come up behind them and finish the job. It also would allow for some early PC promotions as their corporals and sergeants fall in action.

Afterward, the Germans entered a classic "hurry up and wait" period of frenzy, as they tried to rapidly move troops from Poland to the French border. Officers would be screaming at the PCs to get their gear stowed, to catch this train, to be here or there, but often the trains sat in railway traffic jams. An enterprising PC or two might sneak off for a little unofficial R&R, if willing to run the huge risks of missing one's train with a late return . . .

France

Taking on France was a terrifying prospect for the Wehrmacht. As GM, I would try to sweep away the players' foreknowledge of the campaign by having them scout the Maginot Line for themselves, having superiors speak nervously about the upcoming fight, and assigning the PCs to a crucial mission where "if we break through, all the men behind us will have an open road." In other words, the PCs get the privilege of being among the potential casualties.

GURPS WWII: Return to Honor would be most useful here, of course. Generally, though, some sharp initial fighting should be followed by rapid advance through spotty resistance. The fun part here is that the advance takes place through a French civilian population that not so long ago were neighbors, if not particularly friendly ones. Many of them will have fled, but others will have remained and need dealing with as their homes are passed through. Those who fled also left behind an apparent wealth of coveted goods -- wine, perfume, whatnot. Those PCs with an appetite

for looting should have a field day, here.

After the armistice, the PCs could get in a little skirt-chasing, and perhaps even bump up against some early Resistance attacks. (Or they might run up against some desperate British refugees who didn't make the boats at Dunkirk.)

Africa, or Not

At this point, the Wehrmacht's troop concentrations splintered. A few units went to the high-profile theater of Africa, and many GMs and players will be interested in that campaign, as well. But intriguing alternatives exist. Many troops were instead assembling on the French channel coast, practicing for Operation Sealion. This would have provided more time for carousing while off-duty, but the exercises were not without risk -- toward the end of the Battle of Britain the British bombers came upon a full-scale landing exercise and inflicted immense casualties. The PCs might suddenly find their Swimming skill meaning the difference between life or death. Other units ended up in the Balkans campaigns, advancing through colorful locales against poorly organized opposition.

PCs should get some leave here, too. Those with Dependents will need to bring some goods back to Germany -- if they don't think to do so, their wife or whomever will be most upset with them. As GM, I would also establish some other threat to the Dependent relationship. Perhaps early British bombing raids threaten a mother's home, or a particularly handsome French POW has been assigned to help the PC's wife out on his farm . . .

Russia

In time, of course, most Wehrmacht units ended up assigned to the massive Operation Barbarossa. As GM, I would emphasize that the immense distances marched stressed Wehrmacht resources before any fighting actually took place. PCs should have to deal with their boots wearing out, their supplies falling behind, and long-term exhaustion. The fighting wasn't all that easy, either -- the Germans took serious casualties as they took on whole Soviet armies at once. Perhaps worst of all, if the PCs haven't come across Nazi cruelties by now, they will in this campaign. Few soldiers in Russia didn't witness an atrocity, and how the PCs react to this might make the campaign wildly diverge. The GM should be prepared for any eventuality.

Early in the Russian campaign, leaves home were still available, even plentiful by some standards. After a bit more marching and fighting, I would send the PCs back home again, to find the previously mentioned situations getting worse; i.e., the mother *has* lost her flat to a bomb and is sharing a crowded apartment in an increasingly ruined city, or the wife has written a "Dear John" letter, etc. There should be some hook to the leave tearing the PCs between their domestic and military obligations.

Of course, things will not have improved at the front when the PCs return. They'll find themselves in an increasingly grim struggle, and a really nasty GM might even place them at Stalingrad. The trick there would be getting them back *out*. One viable option would be to have them report to the airfield to pick up some supplies, only to find that the supplies have not arrived, but in the process they would stumble upon some medical evacuees who have frozen to death with their evacuation tags still fluttering on their coats. The PCs can choose between swallowing their pride and stealing the tags, or staying until the bitter end. This isn't a particularly heroic scenario for the GM to set up, but no one should have entered a German-based campaign expecting a particularly heroic experience . . .

Back to France

After D-Day, the GM might move the PCs back to France. He should do everything possible to distinguish the differences in the theaters. In Russia, the PCs would have been fighting other armed men such as themselves on classic **GURPS** terms, rifle against rifle, small group against small group. In France, they should instead have to endure an unending barrage of bombs and cannon shells -- it might days into intense combat before they actually *see* an Anglo-American soldier. It may irritate the players to have to roll umpteen times to avoid a fragmentation effect without having anything to shoot back at, but historically it irritated the German troops pretty thoroughly, too . . .

The Rubble

After the collapse at the Falaise Gap in France, the Wehrmacht entered a scrambling, chaotic end game. The General Staff tried to patch together units to counter the 101 crises facing it, while transportation and civil order eroded within Germany.

The PCs would have more room for initiative here than they might think. Everyone knew the war was almost over, and most everyone concerned himself with staying alive that long, preferably in the west under Anglo-American control. The PCs might slip away from their assigned unit heading east to join a unit in the west as "collected stragglers," or they might even desert entirely to help out their Dependents, who would now be in dire straits. Desertion carried the risk of summary execution if caught, but many troops still took that risk -- in the east, *not* deserting was even more fatal. Regardless, the perils during this period would be immense, and depending on campaign tone and the GM's adherence to classical dramatic rules, the PCs might *have* to die at some point during this climax.

Other Options

The above arc illustrates a typical Wehrmacht experience, and thus ignores a lot of potential side trips. The PCs might end up fighting partisans in the Balkans, dealing with a simmeringly hostile populace in Norway, or even entering the strange new world of the POW camps in the United States. GMs may want to consider steering their campaigns in these directions, or at least keep them in mind as options should the PCs be captured or suffer severe wounds that would realistically keep them from returning to the front lines.

Realistic Fantasy Worlds

The Impact of Magic on Social, Political, and Economic Structures

by Giles Schildt

Fantasy worlds with magic are common. Wizards usually rule the battlefield and dominate adventuring, but sometimes the civilian world somehow missed the magical revolution. Perhaps the royal magicians court tricks are more impressive, but often even the King's court is surprisingly mundane too.

Philosophical Groundwork

The effects magic would have on world economies are of course speculative, but a few things can be assumed when dealing with humans: They will use any available tools, including magic, first to insure their survival by providing food, water, shelter, etc. Once survival needs have been met, people will see to their security and physical comfort. There will be some variance between individuals, but psychological needs such as recognition, dignity, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging will tend to be the next needs addressed. Finally, humans will address what many psychologists call "self-actualization" desires. Depending on the individual these may include self-fulfillment, satisfied curiosity, spiritual experiences, or excitement and adventure.

It is reasonable to assume most humanoid races have similar basic priorities, although the order may vary, and in many cases self-esteem, respect, and other psychological and self-actualization needs are met with completely different activities; and a few fantasy races may not even be motivated by those concepts at all. Motivation is a complex topic, and in some rare cases individuals may radically depart from the norm for their species. A modern example could be a suicide bomber who kills himself in order to make a political statement, or that bomber could believe his actions are the only way to insure the survival of his children.

Magical Industries

Because of this hierarchy of needs, spells that create food and water will be among the most widely known in realistic worlds. A druid that can make plants grow quickly enough to be useful during battles would be worth far more than his weight in platinum to any agricultural operation -- if farms even exist in a highly magical world. If more than a few percent of the population is able to cast spells that create food or water traditional farmers or well diggers might not exist at all. In a world where magic is so powerful solitary sorcerers can blast phalanxes off the battlefield, one of those sorcerers with different spells could feed a city. Even in worlds where mages for some reason can only improve their skills by slaughtering monsters, there would be incredible temptation for aging wizards to settle down and stock the grocery store to make some *really* easy money.

Healing spells also offer vast potential to eliminate survival problems. The traditional magical ability to heal any wound or cure any disease, whether the caster understands the condition or not, is beyond the wildest dreams of even *Star Trek* doctors. Even the much more limited ability to cure any condition the caster understands is comparable to the as-yet-unrealized promises of genetic engineering and nanotechnology.

During the middle ages people usually settled within walking distance of their parents because that was the only way to keep in touch with them. Widely available teleportation and telepathy will enable people to relocate without losing touch with their friends and relatives, much like telephones and airplanes do today. Teleportation accidents may temper enthusiasm, but no more so than airplane accidents keep people from flying.

Magical supplies of food, medicine, and transportation can vastly change the settlement patterns of a world. Settling near water supplies, good farmland, navigable rivers, and natural harbors will no longer be priorities. Instead cities are

likely to be built around sources of spell components. If there are resources magic can't create (iron in some worlds, gold or gems are common) those will be settler magnets. If magic is capable of quenching even those desires the most common locations for settlements may be scenic areas or those with recreational potential.

In most fantasy worlds magic is a powerful tool which can be used to overthrow governments. This nearly guarantees that the ruling class consists of mages, their allies, or a coalition willing to address mages concerns. The major exception: if only a very small portion of the population is able to cast spells and the majority is deathly afraid of them. Of course the wizards could still exert influence on such a government behind the scenes, and may even secretly control it.

Even when magic users are rare they are likely to dominate espionage. Scrying, invisibility or magical disguises, fast communication, and numerous other talents combine to make mages much more effective spies than mundanes.

The ability to magically read minds is the dream of every totalitarian government. A world where the governing class has magic and the general public does not could be far darker than any cyberpunk world. In an egalitarian society there will need to be a mechanism to prevent or detect involuntary mind reading and other abuses. The police may have a magic crimes division that maintains some kind of detection aura.

How Common is Magic?

Since magic is usually more efficient than physical labor, in a society where everyone can learn magic spells everyone will. The "four Rs" of elementary school might be reading, writing, arithmetic, and (magic) rituals. Those with lower aptitude will be taught a basic spell like Create Water, and would be expected to cast it 40 hours per week. The most talented may research better magical mousetraps or be organized into elite teams to deal with the accidental demon summonings that accompany spell casting in some worlds.

If the GM wants the shoe shine boy to apply elbow grease instead of uttering incantations then barriers to learning magic spells will have to be erected. The height of these barriers is one of the most significant decisions when creating a fantasy world.

Mixed Economies

When a significant number of people can cast spells but many cannot, countries will have a mixture of magical and mundane goods and services. Wizards and swordsmen will march to war together. Some food may be the product of magic and some the product of agriculture. Of the later, some may have been magically accelerated while another portion was grown the old fashioned way. Even if magic is much more efficient, there may not be enough to go around so mundane industries will coexist with magical ones.

How these coexist involves the interaction between social conditions in the fantasy world and economics. Social conditions can vary widely. For example, followers of Malketh may have religious prohibitions against drinking magically created water, or perhaps wizards have convinced the public that created water is healthier because it is purer, or is the magical essence of water. That might even be true. Beliefs are a powerful and flexible tool for a GM to shape his world.

When the actual products are equivalent and people are willing to use either commodity, producers will concentrate on the areas they are best at. For example, assume a mage can create one ton of either food or water each month for a total of twelve per year, and a farmer in the same town can grow six tons of food, pump three tons of water, or produce two tons of each (spending 1/3 of his time on food and 2/3 on water) during the same year. The town needs both food and water in equal amounts, and a mage can produce more of both, but that doesn't mean he should. If the farmer and the mage both produce equal amounts of food and water they end up with eight tons of each at the end of the year, six for the mage and two for the farmer. However, if the farmer only grows food and the mage mostly creates water they will have nine tons of each at the end of the year, six tons of food from the farmer and three from the mage, with nine tons of water all created by the mage. After a little trading, both the farmer and the mage are better off

because the farmer only has to give up a half ton of water for each ton of food he grows, while the mage needs to forego a full ton of water for each ton of food he creates. This is called a comparative advantage, and is the primary determinant of which industries wizards dominate and which industries mundanes prosper in when some people cannot learn spells.

Social conditions will tend to keep industries from becoming all magic or all mundane, but even a small comparative advantage will affect most producers. The few individuals who refuse to teleport will only keep a handful of passenger ships in business. Comparative advantages can also vary from town to town with changes in the fertility of farmland, availability of raw materials, and so on.

Magic usually enjoys an absolute advantage in everything, but the comparative advantages are more important when the supply of magic is limited. The comparative advantage magic enjoys over traditional means varies from world to world and game system to game system, but this short list can get you started for most of the popular roleplaying grimoires. Magic usually enjoys its greatest comparative advantages in medicine, communication, transportation, and detection. Warfare, protection, and many crafts (metal working, etc.) tend to be a kind of middle ground. Mundane techniques tend to have comparative advantages in food production, water acquisition, and many other mundane tasks. Also worth noting, a few tasks like weather control and mind reading are only possible with magic in most worlds.

Of course a GM can always remove or introduce spells and alter mundane economic factors -- like the fertility of farmland -- to create the economic advantages he wants in his campaign. "Ritual" spells that take hours to cast are one way to add economic advantages without unbalancing adventuring magic. It is also possible for traditional craftsmen to enjoy an advantage making objects while mages have a comparative advantage repairing them, or vice-versa.

Magic and Social Classes

Some societies may impose tariffs on magically produced goods in order to keep mundane industries competitive. This would be likely if wizards are common enough to produce lots of goods or services but not a majority of the population, if a mage's production advantage is significant, or if the ability to learn spells is "something wizards are just born with" or similarly random. (In other words, society does not see it as a trait deserving a special reward.)

If barriers are very high and only an elite few can cast spells, most economic functions will be carried out by traditional means. The talents of that one person in 10,000 will be too valuable for tasks like healing and espionage to squander making bread . . . unless whole cities are starving. If casting costs are also very high, wizards may only use magic for tasks that can not be accomplished by mundane means.

When magic is very rare it will only be available to the rich and powerful, a "detail" that would aggravate class conflicts. If the magic responsible was a secret extended lifespans could be used to justify a king's divine right to rule, but peasants whose children are dying of minor diseases while the nobles hoard longevity potions may organize revolts.

If barriers are low and a majority of the population can cast spells it may be difficult for those who can't to make a living. They may become wards of the state, slaves with a social status comparable to golems, or experimental subjects in less savory societies.

Most fantasy worlds fall somewhere in the middle, and the GM must decide which industries wizards favor and why, who their services are available to, and how magic alters social conditions.

Exactly what prevents everyone from learning spells is also important. If Magical Aptitude is something wizards are born with, then people without that advantage may resent mages. Sorcerers in such a society may need to perform many charitable activities to maintain their relations with the general public. Alternatively, if spells can only be learned through long and difficult studies many societies will respect the dedication required and accord wizards a status similar to what doctors enjoy in modern society.

Because of their special abilities, conjurers will tend to either be the power brokers in society or a resented and

oppressed minority. Which station they assume will depend how many mages there are, whether the public considers them useful merchants or a threat, the historical behavior of wizards, what competing power groups there are, how effectively the public can deal with magical scrying, and many other factors. Mages could also be nearly unknown, living in remote locations or maintaining cover identities. When sorcerers are persecuted, that cover identity is an important secret, and unless magic is a well kept secret it will be the most important factor shaping the culture and economics of a fantasy world.

Designer's Notes: Hellboy Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game

Tending Towards Hero

by Phil Masters & Jonathan Woodward

The BPRD: We're like the Meddling Kids, if Scooby was a 500-year-old homunculus named "Roger."

In many ways, *Hellboy* was a natural and easy subject for an RPG -- and it didn't have to be a terribly arcane or complicated RPG, either. Mike Mignola's comic is straightforward and action-oriented at heart. It's about a bunch of characters (especially but not exclusively the Big Red Guy himself) who plunge into action against supernatural evil, and beat it up. (Or get beaten up by it, depending.) It's inherently fast and direct. There's some investigation, to be sure, and a fair amount of double-crossing and plot twists, but it doesn't get absurdly indirect or angst-ridden.

It's also very easy to present and understand. Hellboy's opponents aren't drawn from an exotic private mythology which has to be explained from the ground up; they're werewolves and vampires and ghosts and black magicians. Anyone who knows the plots of a few horror films can grasp things very easily. On top of this, we have the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense (the BPRD), which is a PC's dream patron -- an organization which employs all types of academic experts, human warriors, weird creatures, and paranormal talents, sends them out to fight evil, and provides backup afterwards, while not encumbering them with too much in the way of bureaucracy or time-consuming mandatory training. All we, the authors, had to do was collate the information from the comics (adjusting it for Mike Mignola's rulings as to what was fully canonical), and fit some rules around it.

The BPRD: Where "combat monster" is a job description.

We were able, when putting the book together, to lean hard on earlier [GURPS](#) material. In particular, we could look to the excellent [GURPS Spirits](#) for both mechanics to handle immaterial supernatural beings, and for the ritual magic rules (which it in turn derived from the classic [GURPS Voodoo](#)). These latter looked like the most appropriate system for the sorcery of Hellboy's world. After all, he himself was brought to Earth by a summoning ritual, and other magicians in the stories use a similar array of invocations and talismans. However, a quick look at the source material suggested that we actually needed *three* sets of rules for paranormal powers.

Aside from ritual magic, there was of course psychic power. This covered both Liz Sherman's spectacular pyrokinetic abilities and the subtler "mediums" and "psychics" who mostly appear in the background of the comics. The fit there was obvious; *GURPS* psionic powers were almost exactly right. That said, we had to apply a few tweaks to the system (as is permitted by the "Powered by *GURPS*" concept under which this game was being created). Apart from anything else, while *Hellboy* isn't a superhero comic (one of the mantras we held in the front of our minds), the effects Liz Sherman creates are a bit more spectacular than "standard" *GURPS* pyrokinesis. Still, the basic mechanisms didn't need much adjustment. Spell-based magic was another matter.

The reason we wanted to use *GURPS* spells, at least as an NPC mechanism, was that it gave us a neat, unified system for handling all the paranormal stuff that doesn't easily fit under the other two headings. When Rasputin breathes fire, or the demon Ualac transforms a victim into a monkey, it looks a lot like spells, and referring to it as such is simpler and tidier than inventing arbitrary powers as required. However, the standard spell-based magic rules take up a fair-sized chapter in the [GURPS Basic Set](#), and a couple of 128-page supplements to detail in full. We tried trimming it down to [GURPS Lite](#)-like proportions, but the necessary chains of prerequisites still occupied too much space. We had to find another way to make them fit.

The final approach was the result of a fair bit of back- and-forth discussion in the playtest phase, but we think that the results are worth it. (Of course, the rules we present are still short. *Hellboy* players and GMs who really want to run

amok with spells as weird magical effects are still encouraged to pick up [GURPS Magic](#).) Several other approaches were considered and rejected along the way, some of which might be useful in variant *Hellboy* campaigns, or other *GURPS* games. One in particular, derived from existing optional rules, definitely has its own quirky charm. So, as a bonus (and in slightly-altered and improved form), here it is . . .

GURPS Spells as Knacks

The BPRD: We bring good things to life . . . then we hire them.

This magic system is a simplified alternative to the system presented in the *GURPS Basic Set* and *GURPS Magic*. It allows wizards to pick spells off a menu, without regard for skill level or prerequisites. Wizards built with *GURPS Magic* can be much more flexible, but they'll have to learn simple spells before they can learn complex ones like those presented here.

These "spells" are all knacks (*GURPS Magic*, p. 96), with the following modifiers:

- *Requires Magery*: -10%
- *Requires spellcasting roll vs. IQ + Magery*: -20%
- *Affected by mana levels (e.g., roll is at -5 in low-mana zones)*: -10%
- *Normally requires rituals*: -20%

These modifiers total -60%. In game terms, wizards must first buy the Magery advantage. They are then eligible to buy knack-style spells (including those listed below), each of which is treated as an advantage. They do not need to buy prerequisite spells! Spells are balanced directly by cost.

Mages can buy new knacks at any time, so long as there's an in-game rationalization. If the spell has prerequisites *other* than spells (such as IQ or Magery requirements), the mage must meet them in order to buy the spell.

Casting Knack-Type Spells

A spell's duration, cost, and time to cast are unchanged. All spells are known at effectively the same "skill level": IQ + Magery. The rituals required are those listed under the *Alternate Magic Ritual Rule*, on p. 7 of *GURPS Magic*; gestures with both hands, ritual foot motions, and incantations in a firm clear voice. The other options of that rule apply: the rituals can be simplified, at the cost of a penalty to the roll, or enhanced, for a small bonus.

Sample Spell Costs

Here's a short list of the cost of knack-type spells under this system. (Since the descriptions of the spells are unchanged, we won't repeat material here that can be found in *GURPS Magic* or the *Hellboy Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game*.)

- *Apportation*: 15 points
- *Body of Air*: 7 points
- *Breathe Fire*: 16 points
- *Concussion*: 16 points
- *Fireball*: 13 points
- *Great Hallucination*: 40 points
- *Shapeshift Other*: 96 points
- *Strike Blind*: 64 points

Implications of Using Knack-Type Spells

First off, mages will become a lot more specialized. With no need to purchase prerequisites, and with each individual

spell more expensive, mages will only buy those spells central to their concept. This is not crippling -- many fictional mages get by with just one or two signature effects. It may also speed up play, since players won't be hunting through long lists of spells for something useful.

Since the spellcasting roll is a flat IQ + Magery, it's no longer possible to buy up skill in just one spell. For magic to be reliable, the mage has to have a good IQ and probably a high level of Magery. This may discourage Johnny One-Spell characters, as buying more spells makes better use of the points spent on IQ and Magery.

The Unified Paranormal Powers Theory

The BPRD: We're what would happen if Buffy got some funding.

Of course, the work of getting rituals, spells, and psychic powers to work together didn't end there. Most **GURPS** books are very quiet on the issue of how those forces interact, devoting at most a sidebar to it, and leaving much of it up to GM fiat. In the *Hellboy* world, these powers are explicitly manifestations of the same "metapower," and rules for their interaction were *required* -- particularly since this book's target audience includes a lot of potential first-time GMs!

Upon inspection, the problem wasn't as fearsome as we originally thought. When two powers interact, one is usually offensive, and one is defensive. The tricky part is that what a given defense protects against is, in existing **GURPS** books, usually defined fairly narrowly, and only with reference to the book in question. Mind Shield works against Psychic Vampirism, Telereceive, and Mental Blow. Magic Resistance works against spells. Et cetera.

In order to integrate the three systems, it was only necessary to restate the offenses and defenses in terms of *what* they protected, and *how*. A telepathic Mind Shield protects one's mind. The Strike Blind spell affects the body. Ergo, a Strike Blind spell isn't affected by a Mind Shield -- but a spell defined to affect the mind (such as Fear) would be. Rewriting the various spells, rituals, and psychic powers so that what they target or affect is explicit made many interactions fall into place.

The question of *how* a given defense works against a given offense still remained. Fortunately, all offensive abilities require a skill roll, and almost all defenses affect that roll in one of two ways: They either have a power, which subtracts from the offensive skill, or they have a skill of their own, and engage the offense in a Quick Contest. (A few other paranormal defenses work in terms of physical **GURPS** defenses like DR; no special rules were required for them.) Stating which protective powers worked in which manner allowed all the rules for defending against paranormal abilities to go at the top of the chapter, in generic form. Beyond that, all that was required was a little inclusive language, and some standardization of the formats for presenting rituals, spells, and psychic powers. While the three sections of the Paranormal Powers chapter still show some seams where they were joined together, we hope the [Hellboy Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game](#) presents, for the first time, a consistent system for melding **GURPS** spell-based magic, ritual magic, and psionics.

Cinematic Points!

GURPS Rules for Cinematic Play

by Chad Underkoffler

A common (but debatable) complaint about the GURPS system is that it doesn't adequately permit highly cinematic or four-color play, or to do so, require ridiculously large point values. This article provides suggested rules to address those debated points. If you're interested in cinematic play with frenetic action and four-color heroics, look no further!

CP! (Cinematic Points!)

The first change from the standard procedure is to award character points throughout a session, in addition to the normal experience awards at the end of an adventure. These points can be saved as usual for character advancement, or can be spent in play to generate a number of high-octane effects by the players in a cinematic campaign. When used in this fashion, character points are called Cinematic Points! (CP!s), and the player can shift the odds to his character's (or even another's) benefit, change the circumstances of a situation, or boost a character's abilities for the duration of an action or scene. While the GM has the final approval or veto of a CP! expenditure, it is recommended that the GM allow any change that does not utterly or irreparably damage the playing experience. So long as the change is fun and not illogical or incongruous (in the GM's opinion), it should be fair game.

GMs should not generally use this ability for NPCs, except in the case of Master Villains (and that to a limit of 3 CP!s per session, usually for escape or survival). However, players are free to use CP!s to affect NPCs, again subject to GM approval.

Awarding CP!s

CP!s should be given by the GM throughout play for especially exciting, risky, entertaining, or amusing PC actions. A recommended breakdown of rewards appears below:

CPs Reason for Award

- 1 Rolling a critical failure; taking a purposeful, substantial risk; amusing in-character witticism or action.
- 2 Rolling a critical success; taking a purposeful, tremendous risk that moves the action of the game forward; memorable quote or stylish action; causes laughter and approval of players and/or GM.
- 3 Taking a ludicrous and entertaining risk in character; an amusing quote or action that will recur again and again in gaming war stories; causes game-stopping hilarity or applause of players and/or GM.

These CP! awards are in addition to the normal character point awards given at the end of sessions, adventures, or campaigns as experience.

Spending CP!s

CP! Tokens

A fun way to represent earned CP!s is a physical token. A particular color or type of die, paper clips, pennies, glass beads, go stones, checkers, pretzel sticks, Oreos, etc.; any reasonably uniform token will do. A token will:

- Be a visible reminder of how well the player is running his character in a cinematic sense (look at that pile of dice!),
- Aid the player in remembering that he has options to pursue in case of trouble (it's easier to recall when there's a pile of poker chips in front of him), and
- Inflame the sense of

While players may simply tell the GM what they wish to spend their hard-won CP!s on and erase them from their character sheets, that can be pretty dull. Instead, GMs should encourage their players to describe, in detail, how their CP!s are taking effect. Entertaining descriptions of CP! expenditures are not merely their own reward -- they could lead to plot complications, character development, or even further CP! awards. If players are reluctant to do this (from shyness or lack of inspiration), the GM may do so for them -- but then can feel free to add a plot complication or an additional requirement to the expenditure.

Example: While climbing the Empire State Building in pursuit of a giant chimp, Jill has failed on her Climbing roll. Her player decides to spend 1 CP! on Scenery!, to allow her a chance of survival. If Jill's player says "I grab for a flagpole as I fall past it," the GM may say that Jill has snagged the flagpole safely. If Jill's player says nothing, and leaves it up to the GM to invent said flagpole (or ledge, awning, or gargoyle), the GM is perfectly within his rights to ask that Jill make an Acrobatics roll or a DX-check, to permit Jill to grab the flagpole... which then buckles under her weight, or allowing Jill to land on the flagpole roughly, knocking the wind out of her and stunning her for a round. If pay your points without describing them, you take your chances.

Cinematic Rules, or Things to Do With CP!s

How cinematic should your game be? Will it be an over-the-top science fiction blockbuster, or a stylized noir thriller? By selectively choosing which of the following rules to use, the "cinematic" level of the campaign can easily be varied to reach the desired level of high adventure.

Especially potent cinematic actions are marked in red. Rules that are effective for a single action or throughout a scene are marked in bold; rules that can be effective for a single action only are marked in italics, and rules that are only effective between scenes or are a scene of their own are marked in bold-italics.

A "scene" here is defined as a short collection of related actions or events in a logical progression. Scenes in movies are divided by dissolves, wipes, or cuts; scenes in television shows are often divided by commercial breaks or shots of stock footage; scenes in theater can be separated by the opening and closing of a curtain or a change in scenery; and scenes in books are often indicated by page or chapter breaks. A punch in the middle of melee is simply an action; but scamming your way past the lobby security guards, from entry until the elevator doors close behind you, is generally a scene.

- *Boomerang Payback!:* The character can dish it out as well as he can take it! Any turn a PC takes damage, he can "save" that amount to add to the damage roll of his next successful attack. Note that the character is still wounded, and possibly suffering from Shock penalties. The returned damage does not have to be in the same format of the damage received. If Marshall Dolby gets winged by slugs from Black Garret's hogleg for 3 points, he can add that 3 points to the damage he rolls for his powerful right cross to the bandit's jaw.
- **Dramatic Entrance/Exit/Pose!:** "The door crashes open! There, heralded by a flash of lightning and a boom of thunder, cloak flapping in a gust of wind from the storm, Lady Vouzandra stands, her saber

competition in the other players around the gaming table, encouraging more cinematic play (his pile is bigger than mine!). Note that this could be a drawback for players who dislike feeling pressured into one-upsmanship.

Note that edible tokens are a dangerous proposition -- a player may consume all the M&Ms awarded instead of spending them on cinematic goodness!

CP! Spendthrift vs. CP! Miser

GMs should encourage players strike a balance between spending of CP!s in-play and saving them as "extra" character points for experience. Note that some players are naturally spendthrift (they use CP!s as soon as they get them) and some are naturally miserly (they will not use CP!s under any circumstances). The characters of spendthrifts will naturally be doing more impressive feats during the course of the adventure, exhausting all CP!s they glean in a session, while the characters of miserly players will neglect flash and dazzle in favor of hoarding CP!s for building a stronger character. This isn't necessarily a problem: for some, action is their reward, for others a strong foundation is their goal.

However, if the majority of players fall to one end or the other of this spectrum, there may be concerns the GM should address. A spendthrift group

unsheathed. "You!" she roars, pointing her blade at the Count..." By spending 1 CP!, a character may make an impressive entrance, stunning (or causing Fright Checks) any onlookers momentarily.

- **Flesh Wounds!** (p. B183): Any time when combat is not actually going on, a PC can be healed back to full HT (or Hits) by spending 1 CP! A later version of this rule (found on p. CII-151) modifies Flesh Wounds to heal all damage except crippling injuries, all fatigue, and (if that optional rule is being used) all stun damage. Depending upon rules in play and the frequency of CP! awards during a session, GMs may have to further modify this rule to prevent abuses - perhaps 1 CP! heals 1/2 or 1/4 damage instead of full hits.
- **Flurry of Blows!:** In combat, a PC may spend 1 CP! to gain an extra attack, but not one they've used already. If Doc Wild punched Jack Moonbeam, then spends a CP!, he may not punch again, though he could kick Moonbeam, do a leg sweep on him, tackle him, push him out a window, clock the villain with the barrel of his autopistol, etc.
- **Flurry of Blocks (Parries, Dodges)!:** In combat, a PC may spend 1 CP! to gain an extra defense, including one they've used already, even against the same attack. If Jack Moonbeam failed his Brawling parry while mixing it up with Doc Wild, he may attempt another!
- **I Am The Wind!:** By spending 1 CP!, the PC may move cinematically to a distance of twice their Move. This includes, but is not limited to, swinging from chandeliers, quickly vanishing from view right from under the noses of others, running through a hail of Tommy gun fire unscathed, appearing out of the shadows behind a foe, leaping to escape an explosion, and so forth.
- **Lucky/Unlucky Shot!:** For 3 CP!s, a PC can shift the result of a skill or Attribute roll by one category (critical failure, failure, success, and critical success) for good or ill. If Machine Gun Mary gets Sally Clash in her sights and scores a successful hit, Sally's player can change that to a miss. If Sally then lands a grenade at Mary's feet, Mary could spend 6 CP!s (whoa!) to convert that throw to a critical miss -- the grenade bounces, rolling back right in front of Sally! Too much backspin on that pineapple, Sal!
- **Make It Count!:** When it's crunch-time, a PC can buckle down and really concentrate on the task at hand. By spending 1 CP!, he can add 3 to his effective skill level for the next action or scene. When Soapy Sam really needs to sweet-talk that guard or the whole caper will be blown, that's the time to make it count.
- **Props!, Scenery!, and Extras!:** For those times when the right tool is not at hand, the PC can find it with Props. Wish the road ahead of your getaway car was a bit more winding? Change it, with Scenery. Never a cop around when you need one? Sure there is, with Extras.

Props! are objects that can be picked up, moved around, or controlled by a PC -- tools, small appliances, containers, and so forth. Scenery! is the location and appurtenances thereof -- chandeliers, rugs, furniture, quality of highway, kitchen sink. Extras! are the folks wandering around -- pedestrians, EMTs, waitstaff, theater ushers, etc. Note that summoning an Extra! should usually take place between scenes or as a scene of its own; however, some GMs may wish to allow Extras! to walk-on in the middle of another scene.

Objects, location alterations, or people that would definitely be in a

will improve slowly, especially if the characters are able to spend unspent character points in addition to CP!s. In that case, the wise GM might consider increasing the number of CP!s given in a session or denying the use of unused character points, so that there will be character points earmarked for character improvement. A miserly group could advance too quickly for the GM to provide adequate challenges, so the GM might consider reducing the number of CP!s given during play, or ruling that unused CP!s convert to 1/2 or 1/4 their value in character points.

Pooling CP!s for Teams

GMs may choose to allow PCs to "pool" some or all of their CP!s for use by anyone in the group. Whether usage is on an as-needed, first-come-first-serve, or vote-by-majority basis is up to the contributors to the CP! pool. This option can add to a group's esprit de corps, or can degenerate into sulky arguments. GMs be warned: know your group before allowing them to do this, and discuss the ramifications of issues like "what happens to unspent CP!s in the pool at the end of the session?" beforehand. (Options for resolving this could include a range of choices from simple division amongst the players to a group-vote on Most Valuable Player Character, with the pool being the prize purse.)

location (a wrench in a body shop, a hay bales in a barn, or a barkeep in a Western saloon) can be "revealed" by the PC spending 1 CP! Things, place changes, or individuals that could be in an area (car keys to the car in the body shop, a block-and-tackle setup in the barn, or a piano player in the saloon) should cost 2 CP!s. Objects that probably wouldn't, but still might in theory be in the area (a monster truck in the body shop, a hidden root cellar in the barn, or a Texas Ranger in the saloon) costs 3 CP!s. Outrageously out-of-place stuff (a jet-fighter in the body shop, a dinosaur mural painted inside the barn, or an astronaut in the saloon) just can't be there, no matter how many CP!s are spent.

- *Roll With It!*: "Grasshopper, in storm be like reed, not like oak." Whenever PCs are hit for damage, they can instinctively roll with the blow, eliminating 1d damage per CP! spent. Alternately - and especially for Ludicrously Large Amounts of Damage from explosions, vehicle crashes, and artillery strikes -- damage taken may be reduced to 1/5 the total by spending 2 CP!s.
- **Scene Blocking!**: For 2 CP!s, a character may manipulate the position of one character within a scene. "As the door opens, the guard catches you in front of the file cabinet with the beam of his flashlight." "I call Scene Blocking! -- when the guard opens the door, I'm actually beside the file cabinet, partially hidden by its shadow."
- *Second Wind!* (p. CII-151): Works exactly like Flesh Wounds! (above), but can be triggered in the middle of combat, for 3 CP!s.
- **Slo-Mo Sequence!**: The film starts to slow down and time seems to stand still as the character moves with blinding speed! For each 3 CP!s used, the PC gains an additional action. Not just useful in combat, either -- handy for athletic competitions, last minute grabs for allies falling to their doom, or escaping from pursuit.
- *Special Delivery Damage!*: The character knows just where to punch, kick, or aim to do a little bit more damage, just has their dander up enough to put some real hurtin' on their opponent, or maybe the Forces of Right are on their side. For each CP! spent, the character may add 1d to their next damage roll.
- **Sure, I Can Do That!**: Has a character been presented with a situation -- say, skiing down K2 while avoiding gunfire from AK-47 wielding ninjas? -- and discovered that they lack the relevant skill (in this case, Skiing)? Well, fear not, Action Hero(ine)! All you need to do is spend 1 CP! to allow a roll (against IQ for mental skills or DX for physical skills) to cover for the lack of a particular mundane skill for the duration of a scene.
- **Take That!**: You don't just have leverage, leverage is your homeboy. A PC may double the Knockback of a strike in combat by 1 die per CP! spent. Useful for "accidentally" knocking pesky Mad Scientists into the calderas of active volcanoes.
- **Time-Compression Montage!**: The film starts to intercut rapid scenes of intense training or fevered construction -- or the story goes into a flashback, detailing past events or information -- and then snaps back to the present. By spending 3 CP!, a PC can instantaneously undergo training in the middle of a session or "discover" a previously hidden Advantage or skill (provided he has the unused character points to spend on improvement, of course). This rule is also useful for constructing or repairing machines before the next scene -- when you absolutely, positively, need a cannon that shoots cabbages right now!

- **Push My Luck!**: If the GM permits this option, a PC may go into temporary CP! debt, acquiring -5 points of temporary Disadvantages per 1 CP! of debt. These disadvantages will last until the CP! debt is paid back; and will not be able to be otherwise alleviated.

For example, Mark Solar, Space Ace, is in a bloody dogfight with the Jovian Max through the rings of Saturn. Through the course of the combat, he's exhausted his entire store of CP!s; and the Max has finally gotten a good position on our hapless hero. If he could Make It Count! to the tune of 2 CP!s (+6), he would be able to pull off a dangerous spin-thrust-rotate-burn maneuver and lose the Max in a cluster of ice asteroids. Mark decides to Push His Luck! He attempts his daring maneuver at +6 to his Piloting skill and succeeds - but at the cost of sending a power surge through the life support circuits of his G-Suit! The whole-body electrical burns have given him a temporary version of Low Pain Threshold, which will haunt him until he's able to repay his CP! debt.

Getting Fancy with Cinematic Stunts

One way to augment the effect

Using CP!s for Short-Term Advantages

The above choices are not the only things that PCs can do with CP!s; they can summon up the brass for a lot of flamboyant actions. As a guideline, 1 CP! can grant a temporary, limited use of an Advantage equal to roughly 5 points -- as always subject to the GM's veto. This benefit can last for a single action or scene, and is cumulative with any existing Advantages.

Not every Advantage is amenable to this treatment, though. Advantages like Clerical Investment, Destiny, Flight, Magery, or Psionic Powers are generally outside the boundaries of this use of CP!s; however, on a case-by-case basis and given suitable dramatic reason, campaign setting, or play style, the sky is the limit! (Also see Weird Advantages, below, and the Getting Fancy with Cinematic Stunts boxed text.)

Advantage	Cinematic Action	Suggested Effect
Alertness	Eyes and Ears Peeled	Gain +1 to Sense rolls per CP! spent
Charisma	Turn Up the Charm	Gain +1 to reaction rolls (possibly, Charisma-affected skills, too) per CP! spent
Combat Reflexes	In the Zone	Gain benefits of Combat Reflexes for the duration of a scene at a cost of 3 CP!s
Contacts	I Know A Guy	Gain a one-use Contact for the scene for 1 CP!
Eidetic Memory	Cram Session	For 2 CP!s, memorize a page of text, a string of numbers, a diagram, or other reasonable amount of information permanently
High Pain Threshold	My Grandma Hits Harder Than That!	Can avoid shock penalties for a blow by using 2 CP!s
Intuition	I Have A Hunch	Need a clue? Spend 3 CP!s and let the GM drop a hint (using the Intuition rules on p. B20)
Luck	Rabbit's Foot	Force a reroll for a cost of 1 CP! (This Cinematic Action is discounted de to its single-shot nature. Compare with Luck, p. B21.)
Magic Resistance	Superstitious Rot!	Subtract 2 points from the effective skill of the spell cast per CP! spent
Rapid Healing	Shake It Off	Add 5 to HT when rolling to recover from a crippling injury

of the various extra-normal abilities in GURPS (Magic, Psionic Powers, Racial Advantages, or Super Powers) is to allow powered individuals to use CP!s to add temporary Enhancements or momentarily reduce Limitations to those abilities. (For a useful list of Enhancements and Limitations, see pp. CI-109-112.) One CP! is worth a +10% modification under this scheme, and can go a long way towards making magic, psionics, or super powers more flexible in a Cinematic or Four-Color idiom. Use of CP!s in this fashion is called a Stunt.

Super, Psionic, and Racial Advantage Stunts Imagine that the Insubstantial Doctor Spectre is using his Fright Vision to mentally assault Laser Lass, chortling all the while. Normally, Laser Lass cannot touch the fiend while the Bad Doctor is in his ghostly form. But today, driven by anger and fear and concern for the bystanders watching the battle, she reaches down deep and refocuses her Laser abilities to pierce through Spectre's Ectofield! She spends 2 CP!s for the Stunt of Affect Insubstantial (normally, a +20% Enhancement). She blasts Doctor Spectre with her beam, and suddenly, the shoe is on the other foot. "But no one can touch me!" he wails as his concentration falters...

For Supers-specific Enhancements and Limitations, see pp. SU48-54. Psionic Stunts and Racial Advantage Stunts work similarly to Super Stunts. For Psionics-specific Enhancements and Limitations, see pp. P27-30; for Racial Advantage Stunts, use pp. CI-

or lost hits for 1 CP!

Reputation	You Know Me	Target knows of the PC, who gets a +1 to Reaction Rolls involving the Target per CP! spent. (This can offset negative reaction modifiers.)
Strong Will	True Grit	PC musters up all their willpower and gets +1 to Will Rolls per CP! spent
Wealth	Sudden Windfall	PC receives a lucky influx of cash equal to 5% of the campaign's starting Wealth level for 1 CP! (GMs should use great discretion in allowing repeated use of this Cinematic Action.)

Weird Advantages

GMs may choose to allow PCs to spend CP!s to temporarily boost a Weird Advantage, be it Magery, a Psionic or Super Power, or a normally incongruous (or abusive) Advantage like Destiny or Sanctity. A good guideline to follow would be to have the player describe, in even greater detail than normally required for a CP! expenditure, exactly what is happening with that Advantage, why it's happening, and what they believe the effects should be. This should provide even more plot twists and complications for the canny GM to play with, and may have long-term ramifications for the entire campaign!

Example: Ketil the Laugher, a PC, has been captured by a Troll Witch, and wants to spend some of his CP!s to escape. If the Troll Witch simply must release Ketil because his Wyrd (Destiny) of "Will die in combat against a giant" demands it, what role does the episode of the capture now serve in Ketil's overall Destiny? Does something the Troll Witch do to Ketil make him better equipped to meet that Destiny? Perhaps she carves a rune of her own design on the Viking warrior's chest, then unfortunately turns her back on the young Viking, allowing Ketil to break free and grab his sword... Afterward, Ketil discovers that he can now sense when giants are near...

Cinematic Points! can also be spent, once per session, to reduce the effect of a Disadvantage. This doesn't remove the Disadvantage, even temporarily (Blind characters are still Blind, for example); it just eliminates the penalties associated with it. Does a Lame character need to sprint to make that last chopper out of the LZ? Spend 3 CP!s to let him hobble on that crippled leg at full normal Move. Police detective with Bad Temper needs to keep his cool in front of the Commish? Spend 2 CP!s. Woman doctor in the Old West needs to impress the Mayor of Podunk City, NV? Spend 2 CP!s to remove the penalties for Social Stigma.

Note that if a player is repeatedly spending CP!s in sessions to ameliorate a Disadvantage, it is in their best interest to simply save those points and buy off the Disadvantage normally.

Making Access an Advantage

Some GMs may not be comfortable with unilaterally applying these rules across an entire campaign, but could see their way clear to allowing certain characters to have access to them (i.e., some or all of the PCs and signature NPCs).

109-112.

Magic Stunts

Applying Enhancements to the results or effects of magical spells is a quick and easy way to allow special effects not covered by Special Delivery Damage! or Make It Count! (i.e., other than a simple success or damage modifier). Another option would be to allow characters to use CP!s to influence the process of spell casting. Some suggestions are:

- Permitting the caster to ignore a single "ritual" requirement (like having hands and feet free or needing to speak) for 1 CP!
- Halving the Fatigue cost of a spell for 1 CP!
- Letting PCs spend 1 CP! for a limited version of Second Wind! That only restores Fatigue -- but no Hits for 1 CP!
- Reducing the casting time for a spell to Concentration for 2 CP!s.

The advantages below offer ways to restrict access to CP! usage. Load 'em up, and prepare for thrilling, larger-than-life adventure!

Cinematic Hero!

15 points + 5 points/CP!

This advantage is only appropriate in a cinematic campaign.

Sometimes, circumstances around you arrange themselves to your benefit. You outmaneuver obstacles in your path. You reach down deep inside to make a change by sheer willpower or derring-do. You are a Cinematic Hero!

The Cinematic Hero! Advantage allows the PC to spend Cinematic Points for dramatic purposes - to juggle the odds in their favor, to pull off audacious feats, or to recover from injuries that would kill a more "realistic" character. This costs 15 points.

For every 5 additional points spent on Cinematic Hero!, the character starts each session or adventure with 1 Cinematic Point (CP!) available for immediate use, to a limit of 3 CP!s. These points refresh between sessions, and are in addition to any unused points from previous sessions.

Special Ability (variable)

5 points + Variable

This advantage is only appropriate in a cinematic campaign.

You have a special ability that you can activate irregularly, usually when it counts the most. It's not something you can particularly rely on, and takes a lot of effort to unleash, but when you do, it gets the job done.

The Special Ability Advantage reflects the "finishing move" of video game, comic book, or anime reality (examples of Special Abilities include the finishing moves of characters in Mortal Kombat, the Human Torch's "nova blast," and the blazing sword of Voltron). A character with the Special Ability advantage can purchase an Advantage (this includes Occult, Racial, or Super Advantages) at 1/5 normal cost, which will then only be triggered with an expenditure of CP!s (1 CP! per 5 points of the Advantage's normal cost). The character may spend CP!s earned in play or unspent character points gained from experience awards for this ability. Particularly nasty GM's may allow a desperate character lacking CP!s to "sell back" Advantages or skill levels (or even take on new Disadvantages!) in play to glean the necessary power to activate their Special Abilities.

Example: Linda has Special Ability (Sonic Blast). This costs her 9 points during character generation. She may use her Sonic Scream at any time by spending 4 CP!s. If she does not have any CP!s (or unspent character points), she cannot activate this power, unless her GM allows the "selling back" of Advantages/skills or the gaining of new disadvantages.

Pyramid Review

Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps(e)



Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc](#)

Written by Todd A. Breitenstein

Illustrated by Dave Aikins

\$14.99

"Ready! Aim! . . . Scream!"

It is time to get out the shotgun again, shuck a few rounds, and blow away more members of the shambling undead, because the *Zombies!!!* are back. It has been a rough 12 months for one of last year's most popular boardgames. Within days of its release, the publisher of *Zombies!!!*, Journeyman Press, a division of the United States Playing Card Company, was closed down and the future of both *Zombies!!!* and the then-forthcoming *eBay: The Card Game* were left in limbo. Despite this setback, *Zombies!!!* remained in great demand by the gaming public and eventually -- in March of this year -- the designers managed to come to an agreement with their former employers to produce and sell expansions for the game through their new company, Twilight Creations, Inc.

With *Zombies!!!* once again available to the general public, and the 2001 Origins Award for "Best Graphic Presentation of a Board Game" under their belt, Twilight Creations, Inc. now has two expansion sets available for the game. The first of these is the *Bag O' Zombies!*, which is literally a whole bag full of 100 glow-in-the-dark zombies for \$9.99. With these, players will never run out of zombies while playing the game, which was something of a problem in *Zombies!!!* The second of these is the much anticipated and delayed army/military base expansion set, *Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps(e)*.

Those proud owners of the *Zombies!!!* basic set will know how much value for the buck that they got. After all, a whole hundred zombies and a boardgame is not to be sniffed at . . . Even though *Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps(e)* is only \$5 cheaper, its contents do not disappoint and inside the box, the purchaser will find:

- 15 new Map Tiles
- 30 new Event Cards
- Six "Glow-in-the-dark" Zombies
- A sheet of more Heart Tokens
- A small four-page rules leaflet

The rules leaflet opens with the winning fiction written by Keary Birch from among those submitted by subscribers to the "ZombiesBG" mailing list. This piece is very much in keeping with the air of desperation that can pervade a game of *Zombies!!!*, and gets the reader ready to play this expansion set. Together with the short introduction, this takes up half of the leaflet. The remainder is given over to the rules necessary to play *Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps(e)*, as well as a short FAQ for *Zombies!!!* The leaflet is neatly laid out and very much an improvement upon the rulebook for *Zombies!!!*

The 15 new Map Tiles add a military base area to the basic game, but keeps it apart from the town of *Zombies!!!* It includes the Front Gate, a military Helipad, an Armory, Motor Pool, the Barracks, Mess Hall and -- everyone's favorite -- the Top Secret Lab ("Gee, Eustace, wonder what they do in there?") All of these tiles match the style of those in the basic game and are clearly marked with the letters "ZC(E)" to indicate that they come from the expansion set.

One of the delights of *Zombies!!!* was the gloriously gruesome illustrations on the game's Event Cards, all drawn and painted by Dave Aikins. The artist also supplies the illustrations for the 30 new cards in *Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps(e)*, which come in 15 new types. The cards are slightly larger than those found in the basic game, but once shuffled into the main deck, this difference is not noticeable. The packing process in the copy reviewed had not gone perfectly either, and one or two of the cards are quite badly scored as a result of being sealed into the two plastic packets that they come in. Naturally enough, the cards have a military theme, allowing the players access to dynamite, minefields, and a rocket launcher. Some of the cards are quite amusing, such as "You Don't Need That," which allows one payer to take one item or weapon from another player in the same square; and "No Brains Here," which allows a player to move a zombie in his square to an adjacent one, and is illustrated with a bloke sat on the couch with the TV remote in hand. Players will enjoy the "Rocket Launcher" card with which they can blow away a tile on the edge of the board, removing it from the game and grabbing all of the zombies on that tile for themselves. They will hate the sight of the "Weekend Pass: DENIED," which forces a player to discard their entire hand of Event Cards. The eagle eyed will spot that, strangely, all of the soldiers illustrated on the Event Cards look like one Travis Bickle . . .

To set up a game with *Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps(e)*, the new Event cards are shuffled into the old. The new Map Tiles are also shuffled but kept separate from the original tiles, except for the Front Gate, which is shuffled in. A straight and crossroads sections are also kept aside. The *Zombies!!!* game then proceeds as normal until the Front Gate tile is drawn, when the separated straight and crossroads sections are used to connect the base to the town, but also keep it separate. All three tiles are seeded with zombies as in the normal game.

Throughout the rest of the game, players have the choice to draw tiles from either the *Zombies!!!* stack or from the *Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps(e)* pile. But if taken from the expansion set -- the tiles marked with "ZC(E)" -- they have to be placed adjacent to the military base. Likewise, those tiles from the basic game must be attached to the town. When one pile of tiles is exhausted, players must draw from the other.

Of the new tiles, two are marked with an asterisk. These are the Motor Pool and the Top Secret Lab. When a player enters the Motor Pool, he can grab a jeep and effectively double his movement rate as long as he remains on the road. This is lost if he enters a building, but then he can always return to the Motor Pool for its inexhaustible supply of jeeps! When the Top Secret Lab is played, it is filled not with normal zombies but the "glow-in-the-dark" Zombies provided with the expansion set. These are done in the same pose as those zombie figures found in the basic set and are "Government Enhanced", and are a lot harder to kill! Instead of rolling a 4, 5, or 6 to put them down, a player needs to roll 5 or 6. Further, these zombies move a total of two spaces during their movement phase, compared to the ordinary zombies' one.

If there was one real problem with *Zombies!!!*, it is that a game can go on for a bit. *Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps(e)* discusses this and suggests two methods of addressing it. The first is simply to slip the Helipad tile from the basic game into the lower half of the tile stack. This will bring it out earlier in the game, rather than at the very end. The second is to expand the game with *Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps(e)* as it includes a second Helipad tile. In addition, access to faster movement with the special Motor Pool tile, and Event Cards that allow for greater destruction and movement, should also speed up the game.

Despite these efforts, the game still remains a little slow, and there is still one element that is necessary to play *Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps(e)*: a bigger table than the one you used to play *Zombies!!!* That said, this expansion is not really intended to address the problem of the length of play. What it does do is add more tile-laying, zombie-blasting, racing-for-survival to the basic game, as well as expanding the town exploring to include base-exploring, while still keeping the zombie-liciousness fun of *Zombies!!!* Further it does it upon just one of the many zombie tropes, so there are still plenty of potential expansion sets to come.

--Matthew Pook

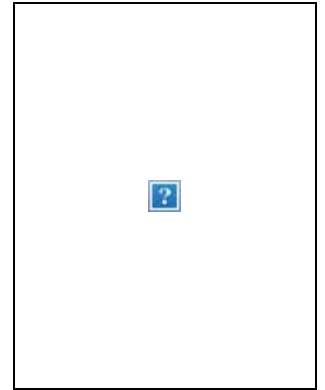
Pyramid Review

The Epic Level Handbook (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Bruce Cordell & Andy Collins

320 page full color HC; \$39.99



In *Dungeons and Dragons*, you hardly ever get to play the kind of character that made you *want* to play the game in the first place. Think about it. How often have you played a character with the depth of Strider, or the surly invincibility of Conan, or the mythic world-shaping sorcery of Elric? The fact is, most *Dungeons & Dragons* games are built around second-stringers. You start off as a feeble apprentice ("Two hobgoblins!? Run for it!"), you play until he gets a decent pile of magic items and special abilities, and then, if you're like most groups, you get an itch to play some other game and you leave your wannabe world-shaker in the middle ranks. Sometimes you go all the way, sure. Sometimes you reach a point where you think, "Wait a minute. My guy is as tough as . . . as . . . as one of those interchangeable David Eddings heroes! Cool!" But it's rare. I've only done it once in my <cough> years as a gamer.

More often, you start at the top. Make him or her up from scratch, skip the years of hard labor, and just have fun walking in a *real* hero's boots for a while. Unfortunately, *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition* doesn't make that easy. In *2nd Edition* and before, it was a snap: give your character stats, a level in one or *maybe* two classes, jot down a few appropriately powerful magic items, and you're good to go. You could fit Elric on an index card. *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*, admirably seeking flexibility and variety, borrows heavily from the *Rolemaster* "assign X points + Y per Z to the square root of Q" school of character development. You have a number of skill points per level (depending on class and stats and race), a maximum skill rank per level (depending on class), feats and special abilities for every X levels (depending on class), and switching classes is easy and expected (though it's more complicated for non-humans). If you aim to create a 12th level character from scratch, in other words, plan to be at it for a while, and keep your scientific calculator handy.

The mathematical challenges get more severe at the higher levels. So severe, in fact, that the game designers themselves put a lid on it at level 20. Beyond 20, characters get so wonky and complicated that the authors themselves, as hardened and crusty a gang of gamers as you'll meet, just didn't want to talk about it anymore. Twenty is it, they said. When you get that far, just go on home.

Well, now you don't have to go home; you can go to the game store and buy another hardcover book instead.

The *Epic Level Handbook* takes the arbitrary-sounding cap of 20th level and raises it to . . . 30. (Which leaves us in suspense, I guess, for the *Super Mega Level Handbook*, to get us through level 42 and the Meaning of Life.) It devotes a sizeable chunk of itself to character creation at levels above 20 -- which means another endless parade of prestige classes, most of which are either unimaginative (the Epic Assassin -- he's *really* sneaky, and *really* deadly) or uselessly specific (the Epic Town Guardsman of the Sample Multiverse-Spanning City Found in the Setting Chapter), and the equally obligatory and endless pile of new feats.

The book manages to break new ground in the chapter on spells, with magic of the spectacularly powerful, earth-changing variety. You know the sort -- Greyhawk's "rain of colorless fire," the pyrotechnics of the Ten Who Were Taken, the world-ending magics of Elric vs. the Gods; really flashy, mythic stuff. The chapter on Epic Magic Items is more uneven, with some that are interesting (the bizarre Gate Key), some that are boring (Gloves of Epic Dexterity +12 -- wonder what they do?), and some that are the obligatory . . . homages . . . of popular fantasy, held over from earlier editions of the game (the deadly bastard sword Stormbr -- er, Soul drinker).

There's a short chapter on running epic-level games, though it seems a little cobbled together, with page-wasters like the chart of stats for Epicly Thick doors and walls. There are too many wonky rules variants and not enough discussion of the kinds of adventures and stories that work best with characters this powerful.

There's a chapter on new monsters, of course. Too many are more of the same, just Super-Sized (Colossus, the Colossal Golem, or the Devastation Spider, a really big . . . spider!); but the original monsters (like some of the creepy abominations) are promising, and might make great plot-drivers of the Smaug or Balrog variety for lower-powered games.

The settings chapter includes a stack of new societies, which -- if you've seen them in other supplements, you've seen them all -- extend the prestige classes out into the game world, making things nice and simple for the players and DM. ("We need a wizard who can make shadows for us. Let's go to the Shadowy Wizard Society!") There's also the City of Union, crossroads of the multiverse (one of the smaller ones, anyway; kind of like Little Rock is the crossroads of America), where everybody is level 10 and up and which serves as a handy shopping mall for Epic-Level Heroes between their Epic Quests. Then there's a short sample adventure -- a forgettable dungeon crawl on the Elemental Plane of Fire -- and a few short adventure seeds which can be developed into full scenarios.

Finally, we get stats for several epic level Forgotten Realms characters, like Elminster and Storm Silverhand, and Greyhawk epics like Lord Rolibar and Mordenkainen -- in fact, only Lord Rolibar and Mordenkainen. Oh well. Maybe next time, Tenser.

The truth is, plenty of games allow you to play epic heroes with fewer headaches. *Elric* was built for it, as was *Amber* (the anti-*Dungeons & Dragons* -- fuzzy rules and no dice), as was just about every superhero game around, if you replace the spandex with loincloths and big swords. But if you don't want to make that particular cognitive leap, even *Dungeons & Dragons* itself, without the epic level special rules, does a fair job with massively powerful characters -- compare Conan in his stories with your typical 15th level Barbarian in the game, and you might be surprised who looks tougher.

Still, the *Epic Level Handbook* is a good DM's resource, although a bit pricy if that's all you want out of it. And there's no denying it's a beautiful book; nobody in the industry can touch Wizards of the Coast for design and graphics. If those are what you're after -- or if you want to play your favorite epic hero and you don't mind the number-crunching, the interminable lists of powers and skills, the nervous balancing of characters and artifacts, and the implicit assumption that dungeons and dragons are all that you need for good fantasy -- the Epic Level Handbook will suit you fine.

--Shane Ivey

Odds and Ends 2002

Well, I'm back from the World Yo-Yo Contest, and I'm busy as ever. Fortunately things have gone relatively smoothly, although I *do* find myself trying to get caught up in various aspects. So if I've been a bit slow in replying to email or otherwise getting back to you, I apologize in advance. August is always a rough month . . .

(For those of you who, for some reason, can't get enough of my ramblings, you may want to consider subscribing to [d20 Weekly](#): I took over the editorial this week while Dale Donovan is out of town at GenCon. If my column this week isn't worth \$20 a year, I don't know what is . . . and I'm not just saying that because they're holding my gaming books hostage until I convince 100,000 people to subscribe.)

Anyway, this week is, I'm afraid, columnloaf . . . bits and pieces I couldn't fit anywhere else.

* * *

Boring Stuff

I haven't been getting many reviews lately. I hope this is because of the lull before GenCon, but if not, then let me say that I'm looking for good reviews, darn it! Bone up on our [writer's guidelines](#) and start submitting!

I've also been making progress with the slushpile, although not as much as I would like. My current goals are to get a lot of it done before I leave for [DragonCon](#) at the end of the month; wish me luck.

* * *

Speaking of GenCon, both John Kovalic and Kenneth Hite are out of town this week at the aforementioned ultimate gaming convention, having fun, hobnobbing with the elite of the gaming world, and getting invited to secret parties where they get to decide the fate of the world. Not that I'm jealous.

Anyway, hopefully these two will be back with us real soon . . . unless, for some reason, they decide that controlling the world is more fun than writing for us.

* * *

Slightly More Interesting Stuff

Two weeks ago in this column's "[Bonus Pointless Anecdote!](#)", I discussed a silly little game where the goal was to make up the weirdest supported "crossover" in various media (for example, the Harlem Globetrotters meeting *The Sandman's* Endless).

Anyway, in the closing of that bit I expressed the challenge of having *I Love Lucy* meet *Aliens*, or having the *Smurfs* meet the *X-Files*. Both of these challenges were answered by enterprising readers on the [Pyramid message boards](#); in fact, I like one solution *much* better than my own.

Having *I Love Lucy* meet *Aliens* is easy: Superman (George Reeves) made a guest appearance on *I Love Lucy*, and there was a *Superman/Aliens* crossover. (And, yes, on the *I Love Lucy* episode they never referred to Superman as anything *other* than Superman . . .)

Smurfs meets *X-Files* is a bit trickier. My solution involved a piece of *really* obscure trivia, and involved the *Simpsons* . . . which, given the cameo-rife nature of the show, is almost destined not to be satisfying.

- The Smurfs made a guest appearance on the *Back to Next Saturday* cartoon preview show in the mid-80s. (For

those of you who don't remember these, the networks used to preview their schedule's coming cartoons in a primetime special.) *Back to Next Saturday* involved Punky Brewster and her friends getting transported to . . . um . . . the realm of Saturday morning cartoons (Punky had her own cartoon at the time as well). Punky met Papa Smurf.

- In the same show, Punky also met Spider-Man (who also had a Saturday morning cartoon).
- Spider-Man met Jay Leno recently as a back-up feature in various Marvel comics.
- Jay Leno made a guest appearance on *The Simpsons*.
- Scully and Mulder also had a guest appearance on *The Simpsons*.

Now, for the two of you who actually *remember* that one-shot primetime special, you may also point out that this link was **really** bogus since, in the end, it turned out the entire show was a dream of Punky's. Even so, after that revelation they left the door open to it having happened; it was the typical "It was all a dream . . . or was it?" ending.

Okay; over on the message boards, two readers worked out the following:

- The Smurfs were on "Cartoon All-Stars to the Rescue," along with the Muppet Babies
- From the Muppet Babies you can get to the *Muppet Show*
- The *Muppet Show* featured any number of guest stars; let's pick Elton John at random.
- Elton John has appeared on the *Tonight Show* with Jay Leno.
- Jay Leno had a guest spot on *Homicide: Life on the Street*
- Richard Belzer's character from that show, John Munch, also guest starred on an episode of *The X-Files*.

Like I said, this solution is a *lot* better than the one I had.

What I find fascinating is that we have two distinct chains . . . *both of which rely on Jay Leno!* Clearly there's a conspiracy here . . .

* * *

Speaking of the *Muppet Show* . . .

For those of you who hang out in the [chat room](#), my chaotic musings are relatively common. I have no idea where the following came from, or what inspired it, but it's been sitting in my "to use" file for a while.

The Judgment Show

(With most sincere apologies to to Jim Henson)

ANGELS: It's time to hone the Mal'kim. It's time to die for right! It's time to blow the trumpet on the Judgment Show tonight!

DEMONS: It's time to summon demons! It's time to fight the fight! It's time to get things started on the Judgment Show tonight.

THOR: Why do we always come here?

LOKI: I guess we'll never know.

THOR: It's kind of Rag-na-Rock-y . . .

BOTH: But with-out all the SNOW!

YVES: It's time to get things started . . .

ETHEREAL SPIRITS: Why don't you get things started?

YVES: It's time to get things started on the

Most Destructional,
All-Reductional,
Grand Celestial,
Seventh Heaven-al!

ALL: This . . . is . . . what . . . we . . . call . . . the . . . Judgment SHOWWWWWWWWWW!

[Gabriel blows the horn; it bleats impotently, and a fluffy bunny hops out.]

* * *

Because **YOU** demanded it . . . er, well, perhaps "demanded" is a strong term. Ummm . . . I think Elizabeth McCoy expressed some mild amusement at the last installment. Blame her.

I speak, of course, of Random Drawn Table, which made its debut [last year](#) and, for some unknown reason, is being resurrected for this year. It's also a postscript (of sorts) to the Character Power Levels essay series; I received a couple of emails wondering if I was going to cover final poll option I used as a guide. Well, until I can think of a serious take on the subject, you'll need to make do with this.

It's a comic . . . it's really difficult to describe.



I promise I won't subject you all to my drawing for at least another year. (Just think how much my art makes you appreciate when John Kovalic comes back . . .)

* * *

Well, that does it for this time. As ever, if you have any comments, please feel free to go to the [discussion boards](#), track me down in the [chat rooms](#), or drop me some email at pyramid@sjgames.com.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **GURPS Martial Arts Adventures**, p. 7.*

(One star) "From 1914 to 1919, Room 40 of the Old Admiralty Building in Whitehall was occupied by a band of crack British codebreakers whose function it was to unravel enemy ciphers . . . According to Royal Navy records, Room 39 was occupied by a specialized communications project during the War, but in reality the small office was devoted to psion research, with particular interest in ESP and telepathy."

The Lyre of Orpheus

by **Loki Carbis**

The magical item known as the Lyre of Orpheus is not actually a lyre . . . or at least, it is not always a lyre. It has been documented appearing as a number of different musical instruments, although only ever stringed ones. It is, however, the very same musical instrument that Orpheus carried with him on his ill-fated attempt to rescue Eurydice from Hades in 1286 BC. Later, it was owned by the Roman Emperor Nero, and was recorded in legend as the fiddle he played while Rome burned in 64 A.D. It is also very likely that this was the instrument owned by the legendary Thomas the Rhymer, the bard who spoke only truth. Since then, it has been identified as a violin, a banjo, a double bass, and most recently as a guitar. Theoretically, the Lyre could take the form of any stringed instrument, from a harp to a piano.

All the indications suggest that the object is even older than the more than 3,000 years it is known to have existed. The true origin of the instrument is unknown to any mortal, but in the more metaphysical planes of existence, both the instrument and its creator are well known; it is likely that Hades was aware of the true nature of the Lyre even if Orpheus was not. The creator of the item is a demon named Traxas, who crafted the instrument himself in the forges of Hell millennia ago. Traxas is the only individual anywhere who is immune to the effects of the instrument. He suffers no curse but receives no bonuses while the Lyre is in his possession, although he too is bound by the rules of the contest (see below), and he cannot give the item to anyone else except through such a competition.

As a musical instrument, it is unsurpassed; in *GURPS* it adds 5 to the relevant Musical Instrument skill of its owner when it is used. In addition, it gives a +2 to the skills of Singing and Performance when used. If its owner should choose to loan it to another musician, that musician will gain +3 to their Musical Instrument skill and +1 to Singing and Performance while using it. These bonuses are compulsory, and cannot be switched off. Physically, it is of the highest quality -- Stradivarius himself would have wept and given up his work had it ever crossed his path. Its appearance is always valuable, with precious metal and gem inlays. It is surprisingly light for its size, weighing maybe 80% of the standard weight of such an instrument. Despite its apparent delicacy, it is utterly indestructible by physical means.

It is also the bearer of an insidious curse. While he or she remains the owner of the instrument, the musician in question can never succeed at any Will roll, including rolls to resist the effects of various disadvantages. Rolls should still be made, as the chances of Critical Failures occurring are as normal, but any success -- including a Critical Success -- should be treated as a failure. The only exceptions to this are characters that possess the Advantages of Fearlessness or Unfazeable -- and only then in situations governed by those advantages.

The GM should do their utmost to prevent the player whose character owns the instrument that they are suffering from such a curse. The subtlety of the curse cannot be overplayed; ideally, no one should suspect the existence of the curse for a long while after the instrument is acquired. To prevent the players from getting suspicious, the GM should insist on making all Will rolls secretly -- and this should start in the game before the Lyre itself appears, to help muddy the connection. No such reticence is necessary regarding the more positive aspects of the instrument, and players should be encouraged to think of it as their character's most prized possession. The last thing they should ever want to do is to get rid of it.

But if they figure out what the Lyre is doing to them, they might well decide to rid themselves of the instrument. This is where the other part of the curse comes into play: No matter how they try, the owner of the instrument cannot be parted from it. The item cannot be sold, given or thrown away -- if it is, it will only make its way back into the owner's hands within three days, in a way that makes it even harder to dispose of, such as a gift that cannot be refused. The owner of the instrument can only part with it in one of three ways. To free himself of the item's curse and survive the experience, the owner will usually go with one of two easier choices: a contest or a ritual purification. The third method is to die; this has become more and more common in the modern era, as the drug-taking culture of popular musicians has caused too many holders of the instrument to fall.

The Contest

This is a competition of musical skill in which the owner must play the instrument. They must play to the best of their ability, not holding back either skill or energy in the contest. The normal skill bonuses for playing the instrument still apply, making losing even more difficult. The ownership of the instrument must be agreed upon as a stake before the contest commences -- the instrument's Will-dampening abilities will affect the judgement of both competitors, making a refusal of these stakes fairly unlikely. This is a straightforward Contest of Skills in *GURPS* terms, although any roll totaling more than 20 (bonuses included) should be considered to be equal only 20, which will increase the number of rounds tied. Both competitors must play until they (and the judges, if any) are in agreement as to a victor. This may lead to several rounds of playing, and the GM should apply the rules for Extra Effort for any rounds after the first two (see p. B89). There are legends of people playing themselves to death in such competitions, which has indeed occurred on at least two occasions. If the current owner then loses the contest, the ownership of the instrument passes to the victor. (The Charlie Daniels Band's song "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" may well be a fictionalized account of such a contest.)

The Ritual

The only other way to get rid of the curse is to humbly abase yourself before whatever gods you worship and beg them to remove this curse from you. The price for this is a number of days of humility, absolute solitude (no phone, no Internet, no television . . . nothing) and moderate fasting (subsisting on water and one bland staple food, such as bread or rice). A day is considered to be from dawn to dawn for the purpose of this purification; no matter what time of day or night the process starts, the count begins from the next dawn. The number of days is equivalent to 20 days, plus an additional number of days equivalent to the total of the unmodified Musical Instrument, Singing, and Performance skills of the owner, less a number of days equivalent to their Will (including Strong or Weak Will). This number may never be less than 40 days.

Each day requires a successful Will roll (which is not affected by the instrument), and any failure to meet all of the conditions means that the whole process must be started over, even if it is not the fault of the person undertaking the purification. Each time the process starts over, one more day is added to the total required. At the end of that time, the instrument will vanish back to Hell, returning to Traxas' hands, and the musician will be free of the curse. They will also have lost their skills of Musical Instrument, Singing, and Performance at the end of that time, and can never regain them. Any points invested in these skills are also lost, although at the GM's option, up to half of them can be applied against the purchase of levels of Strong Will.

Traxas

In the event the owner dies while still in possession of the instrument, the true owner of this cursed item will appear, although Traxas will not do anything to draw attention to himself unless he has no choice. While he is inevitably summoned at the death of the instrument's current owner (when the instrument becomes owner-less), he will usually wait until the fuss of funeral and bequest has died down before reclaiming his instrument and beginning the search for a new owner. Of course, a particularly spectacular or suspicious death might complicate this process, or Traxas may be in a hurry to get the instrument to the next potential owner. Traxas usually appears as a human of stylish appearance, exuding coolness and charm. He affects a certain arrogance about his musical skills in order to encourage challenges.

Traxas himself is a very subtle demon, content to work his way carefully and quietly through the world, slowly amassing souls to Hell and increasing his own power. It is unlikely he would appear on stage other than in a contest, as he prefers to work behind the scenes. It's no coincidence that his masterpiece is an obscure legend connected to a figure from Greek myth rather than to himself; that's exactly how Traxas wants it to be . . . all the better to conceal his ties to the Lyre.

In an *In Nomine* game, he would be a Djinn and a servitor of Kronos, charged with bringing musicians to their fates, and a particular foe of the servants of Eli. He has no Word of his own, but is unusually powerful for a demon lacking one, having 12 Forces or more. Given the choice, Traxas will try to target the most famous musicians he can as the

next owners, so that the legend of rock and roll excess and death grows. It is likely that many famous rock and roll stars were victims of Traxas, although which ones in particular will depend on the needs of a particular campaign.

Campaign Uses

GMs are encouraged to weave the Lyre into the history of their campaign worlds, although the curse should be subtle. The instrument might have been owned by several legendary bards, but only the most vague hints of the curse should be given. Although many of the owners will eventually have fallen victim to the curse, each might do so in a different way: One killed for his gambling debts, another who drank herself to death, still another from contracting diseases from unprotected sexual encounters, and so on.

This magical item already has strong ties to both the *GURPS Greece* and *GURPS Imperial Rome* settings, and could reasonably appear in either of these settings. With no changes, it could also appear in any in any other magical or horrific setting, varying only in its appearance, which changes to match the times: a lute in *GURPS Fantasy/Yrth*, a cello in *GURPS Steampunk*, a guitar in *GURPS Illuminati* or *GURPS Technomancer*, or a graphophonadellaverberator or other futuristic instrument in *GURPS Cyberpunk*.

While the obvious use is as a cursed object, don't overlook the fact that -- due to its proximity to stardom -- the Lyre (in whatever form it currently holds) may well have value as a collectible. The use of mundane motives for possession of the instrument can be an effective red herring in a game where the supernatural aspects are mostly covert.

Traxas himself, for all his subtlety, is very vulnerable to the accusation that he's been resting on his laurels for three millennia. He's getting very anxious to produce another triumph like the Lyre, if only to please his Superior. He might well be encountered in a mortal role, hurriedly scribbling research notes. Alternately, he might possibly hire Infernal PC's to raid the labs of Vapula or the studios of Nybbas, or try to befriend Angelic servants of Jean in order to steal their research.

Alternately, Traxas might be encountered attempting to reclaim the Lyre after the death of its most recent owner. In doing so, he will seek to be as discreet as possible; the characters may actually be hired to perform the theft themselves, or to secure the site against an expected robbery.

Sergei Korolev, "The Chief Designer"

by Joe Trela

Total Points: 202

Age 57, 5' 8", 170 lbs; stocky build, receding black hair, brown eyes

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0], **DX** 11 [10], **IQ** 14 [45], **HT** 8 [-15]

Move: 4 Speed: 4.75

Advantages: Academic Rank 5 (Member, Soviet Academy of Sciences) [25], Administrative Rank 4 (Head of OKB-1 Design Bureau) [20], Charisma +1 [5], Courtesy Rank 6 (Colonel, Red Army) [6], High Pain Threshold [10], Imperturbable [10], Patron (Soviet government, provides expensive useful equipment, 15 or less) [120], Reputation +3 (OKB-1 workers and some government officials, 10 or less) [2], Security Clearance 5 [25], Single-Minded [5], Status: 4 (important official) [20], Strong Will +2 [8], Wealthy [20]

Disadvantages: Age (57) [-21], Bad Temper [-10], Duty (to Soviet space program, almost all the time) [-10], Hard of Hearing [-10], Involuntary Duty (No public recognition, almost all the time) [-15], Minor Delusion (Stalin was misunderstood) [-5], Secret (Diagnosed with cancer) [-5], Sense of Duty (to Soviet Union) [-10], Secret Identity ("Chief Designer", inconvenience if revealed w/Status 4) [-15], Stubbornness [-5], Terminally Ill (1-2 years, cancer) [-50], Very Unfit [-15], Workaholic [-5]

Quirks: Has occasional affairs even though married; keeps close to employees and their work; personal goal is to send cosmonauts to other worlds; prefers casual dress; often threatens to fire people without following through [-5]

Skills: Acrobatics-8 [1/2], Administration-17 [8], Area Knowledge (Baikonur)-15 [2], Area Knowledge (Moscow)-14 [1], Area Knowledge (Odessa)-13 [1/2], Astronomy/TL7-12 [1], Aviation/TL7-14 [2], Boating-9 [1/2], Chemistry/TL7-11 [1/2], Chess-13 [1/2], Engineer (Soviet Spacecraft)-16 [8], Engineer (Airplanes/TL7)-16 [8], Intimidation-12 [1/2], Leadership-14 [2], Literature-11 [1/2], Masonry-10 [1/2], Mathematics-12 [1], Mechanic (Propeller Plane Engines)-13 [1], Mechanic (Soviet Spacecraft)-15 [4], Metallurgy/TL7-13 [2], Philosophy (Soviet Communism)-12 [1], Piloting (Gliders/TL6)-13 [8], Piloting (Single-Engine Prop/TL6)-13 [8], Research-13 [1], Survival (Arctic)-12 [1/2], Swimming-13 [4]

Languages: Russian (native)-14 [0], German-12 [1/2]

Equipment and Allies

Korolev usually carried the tools of his trade -- slide rule, note pad, and mechanical calculator. His position came with considerable perks and the authority to order necessary equipment with his considerable budget (what was necessary, of course, was decided by those above him). He shouldn't have to do any fighting, as he will almost always be accompanied by assistants and security guards (both overt and plainclothed).

Biography

Sergei Korolev, Academician of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and "Chief Designer" of the Soviet manned space program, was born on January 12, 1907 (December 30, 1906 according to the old calendar) near Kiev. His parents

The statistics above are for Korolev in 1964. Before 1964, remove Secret, Terminally Ill and Hard of Hearing, and change Very Unfit to Unfit. Before 1958, reduce Status to 3 and Patron to "helps on a 9 or less," remove Secret Identity and Reputation, and increase HT to 9. Adjust age accordingly.

Academic, Administrative, and Security ratings are based on a

separated when he was young, and his mother sent him to live with his grandparents while she attended school elsewhere. When he was six, he was taken to see a barnstorming flight at the nearby fairgrounds, which may have set his course in life.

By 1917 his mother had remarried and moved the family to Odessa. Sergei was an excellent student, but stubborn and argumentative. This stubbornness may have allowed him to survive a bout of typhus and the chaos of the Russian Civil War. After the Bolshevik victory he attended a local vocational school; outside of class he would often swim to the local hydroplane station and observe the workers (he was at home in the water), eventually serving as a mechanic's helper. He graduated with a broad education covering, among other things, German, gymnastics and tile-laying. Flight, however, remained his primary interest.

In 1924 he entered the Kiev Polytechnical institute, where he built and piloted gliders with other like-minded students. By 1926 he had moved on to the Moscow Higher Technical School while continuing his aeronautical exploits. In April of the next year, a space exhibition at the Soviet capital presented models, drawings and photos based on the works of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Robert Goddard and other rocket pioneers. Although Korolev's presence at the exhibition has not been confirmed, it is unlikely he would have missed it.

Korolev graduated in 1929 and began work at a Moscow aeronautical design bureau. Gradually his focus shifted from ordinary propeller-driven planes to rocket propulsion, and in 1933 he launched the first successful Soviet liquid-fueled rocket, the GIRD-09. The gasoline-liquid oxygen device weighed forty pounds and reached an altitude of about 1300 feet. Over the next few years, his team brought Soviet rocket technology to a level equal with that of any other country; this fruitful period came to an abrupt end when Korolev was arrested by the dreaded NKVD in 1938 for "subversion in a new field of technology".

As was often the case during the Great Terror, Korolev had been implicated by fellow engineers hoping to save their own skins. He was sentenced to ten years imprisonment in the dreaded Kolyma gold mines of eastern Siberia, an arctic hell with a 10% annual death rate. Fortunately a senior aircraft designer, Sergei Tupolev, requested that Korolev be moved to his own Moscow sharashka (scientists' prison) in 1940. There he performed aeronautical research with both free and imprisoned engineers in conditions that, while spartan, were not as lethal as the gulag.

Korolev protested his treatment through a series of letters; throughout his imprisonment he was convinced, like so many, that it had all been a mistake. Nevertheless, he remained loyal to the state even before the German invasion of 1941. In 1942 he was moved further east to Kazan, where he led another team in designing short-range tactical missiles and rocket-powered interceptors. Korolev's prison sentence was lifted in 1944, but he continued to work at the Kazan bureau by his own choice.

At the end of the Great Patriotic War, Korolev was commissioned as a colonel in the Red Army and sent to Germany to sift through the remnants of the Nazi rocket program. Surviving V-2s and their test equipment were shipped to Baikonur in Central Asia; they were later followed by those German rocket scientists who had not made it to the West. Korolev worked systematically, at first firing the captured German rockets with the assistance of their "guests". Later, the Russians made exact copies of the V-2 components and assembled them (again with German help). The first all-Russian missile (the R-2) was fired in 1949, and by 1953 Korolev's own designs had progressed enough that the German scientists were returned to their homeland.

In May 1957 the R-7, Russia's first true ICBM, was test-fired for the first time. Throughout this period the Soviet government steadily increased its efforts to protect its rocket designers. Due to fears of kidnapping or assassination by the West, they and their design bureaus were referred to in public by an array of pseudonyms and ambiguous titles. Korolev was "the Chief Designer", his design group was identified by the opaque acronym "OKB-1", and on the few

scale of 1 to 6, with 6 representing the General Secretary, Council of Ministers and Politburo. Korolev's quest for manned spaceflight is considered a Quirk and not an Obsession because he never let it endanger his own position in the Soviet hierarchy. Piloting and Mechanic: Propeller Engines skills are for TL6 since he learned them before World War II. Even though his identity is secret, his guards, automobile and other luxury items would make it clear to any Soviet citizen that he was a man with high Status.

occasions his picture appeared in Pravda, it was as "Professor K. Sergeev".

While developing military rockets, Korolev maintained one eye on their use in space travel; in fact the R-7 was considered an impractical design for an ICBM due to its radio guidance system and complex launching procedures. He had presented a detailed plan to orbit an unmanned satellite to his superiors as far back as 1954, and in 1956 it was approved. On October 4, 1957, an R-7 carried Sputnik 1 into orbit, inaugurating the Space Age. Korolev remained unknown to the public, but in the halls of the Kremlin he was the man of the hour.

Within OKB-1, Korolev exercised more control than anyone in the American program could dream of. He designed boosters and spacecraft, hand-picked the first Soviet cosmonauts, personally oversaw their capsules' construction and served as a flight controller during their missions. His rugged, versatile designs were used for interplanetary missions, spy satellites and high-latitude communication satellites. And in the midst of this important work, he drew out long-term plans to send cosmonauts on flyby missions to Venus and Mars.

However, OKB-1 operated within the Byzantine ecology of Soviet internal politics. Several design bureaus competed for patronage from the government and armed forces -- one rival group, OKB-456, was led by one of the engineers whose testimony had condemned Korolev to Kolyma. The waste from infighting was magnified by the tendency of the government to fund redundant projects through different bureaus; a common result was that half the work was done twice over. Through magazines, newspapers and classified briefings, Korolev kept tabs on his well-funded American adversaries. He was always hungry for more information, and when Khrushchev made his famous "shoe-pounding" trip to the UN in 1960 he asked to come along but was rebuffed.

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he was by no means fanatical. His constant work to develop secondary uses for expensive military projects indicated that his driving passion was the expansion of human activity into space. Oddly enough, throughout his life he insisted that Stalin was not personally responsible for the Great Terror; even after Khrushchev condemned his predecessor he maintained that his own imprisonment was not the dictator's fault.

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Given the web of secrecy spun around Korolev when he was alive, it would be difficult for players to meet him in a strictly historical campaign. Fortunately, with a skill swap he can be used as the driving force behind technical projects in any era. A low-TL setting would have him designing ships, perhaps as part of some great land power's attempt to expand its horizons. Higher TLs point toward work on more advanced spacecraft, of course, but he just as easily could be breeding combat bioroids or designing the first quark bomb. And in a high-mana world he would be an interesting take on the role of court wizard, harnessing elementals and powerstones to send the kingdom's bravest knights beyond the clouds.

Alternate Earths: On Aeolus, a younger, healthier Korolev might join Coanda and Guerivich in the Republican Alliance to work on the successor to the Mark III, or he could support the ancien regime by creating rocket-powered terror weapons for the Czar. Reich-5 would see him trading roles with his contingent of German scientists (if he's lucky). But Korolev seems tailor-made for Gernsback, where Stalin's attempt to destroy his birthplace of Kiev would have put paid to his Minor Delusion. As a leader of the Scientists' Revolt, he would deserve a seat on the World Science Council and the overflowing budget that came with it. ("Comrade von Braun, putting ten men on the Moon is certainly a good start -- but why not twenty?")

Atomic Horror: "The Yankees say their ionic dissipator can drive those nekulturni Alphans from our skies -- unfortunately, it weighs over ten tons, too much for their puny rockets to carry into orbit. That is where you come in, Sergei..." What better way to free Korolev from his security constraints than to threaten the planet with destruction?

Covert Ops: On one of his visits to Moscow, Korolev drops his hat. Not a big problem, except someone from the American Embassy picks it up, runs after him to return it and ends up gang-tackled by the Designer's KGB minders. While the State Department tries to get him out of Lubyanka, the PCs are tasked to find out why this "Professor Sergeev" fellow is so important...

Bibliography

Fiction

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- <http://www.astronautix.com/astros/korolev.htm> -- A web biography of Korolev. Part of the "Encyclopedia Astronautica", a massive compendium of information on every person and object launched into space (and many that weren't). If you need to know the planned landing site for Apollo 20, the range of a Soviet space station's automatic cannon, or who's training for the first Chinese manned mission, this site is for you.
- <http://www.korolev.ru/> -- Website for the town of Korolev (formerly Kaliningrad), a Moscow suburb.

Sergei Korolev, "The Chief Designer"

by Joe Trela

Total Points: 202

Age 57, 5' 8", 170 lbs; stocky build, receding black hair, brown eyes

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0], **DX** 11 [10], **IQ** 14 [45], **HT** 8 [-15]

Move: 4 Speed: 4.75

Advantages: Academic Rank 5 (Member, Soviet Academy of Sciences) [25], Administrative Rank 4 (Head of OKB-1 Design Bureau) [20], Charisma +1 [5], Courtesy Rank 6 (Colonel, Red Army) [6], High Pain Threshold [10], Imperturbable [10], Patron (Soviet government, provides expensive useful equipment, 15 or less) [120], Reputation +3 (OKB-1 workers and some government officials, 10 or less) [2], Security Clearance 5 [25], Single-Minded [5], Status: 4 (important official) [20], Strong Will +2 [8], Wealthy [20]

Disadvantages: Age (57) [-21], Bad Temper [-10], Duty (to Soviet space program, almost all the time) [-10], Hard of Hearing [-10], Involuntary Duty (No public recognition, almost all the time) [-15], Minor Delusion (Stalin was misunderstood) [-5], Secret (Diagnosed with cancer) [-5], Sense of Duty (to Soviet Union) [-10], Secret Identity ("Chief Designer", inconvenience if revealed w/Status 4) [-15], Stubbornness [-5], Terminally Ill (1-2 years, cancer) [-50], Very Unfit [-15], Workaholic [-5]

Quirks: Has occasional affairs even though married; keeps close to employees and their work; personal goal is to send cosmonauts to other worlds; prefers casual dress; often threatens to fire people without following through [-5]

Skills: Acrobatics-8 [1/2], Administration-17 [8], Area Knowledge (Baikonur)-15 [2], Area Knowledge (Moscow)-14 [1], Area Knowledge (Odessa)-13 [1/2], Astronomy/TL7-12 [1], Aviation/TL7-14 [2], Boating-9 [1/2], Chemistry/TL7-11 [1/2], Chess-13 [1/2], Engineer (Soviet Spacecraft)-16 [8], Engineer (Airplanes/TL7)-16 [8], Intimidation-12 [1/2], Leadership-14 [2], Literature-11 [1/2], Masonry-10 [1/2], Mathematics-12 [1], Mechanic (Propeller Plane Engines)-13 [1], Mechanic (Soviet Spacecraft)-15 [4], Metallurgy/TL7-13 [2], Philosophy (Soviet Communism)-12 [1], Piloting (Gliders/TL6)-13 [8], Piloting (Single-Engine Prop/TL6)-13 [8], Research-13 [1], Survival (Arctic)-12 [1/2], Swimming-13 [4]

Languages: Russian (native)-14 [0], German-12 [1/2]

Equipment and Allies

Korolev usually carried the tools of his trade -- slide rule, note pad, and mechanical calculator. His position came with considerable perks and the authority to order necessary equipment with his considerable budget (what was necessary, of course, was decided by those above him). He shouldn't have to do any fighting, as he will almost always be accompanied by assistants and security guards (both overt and plainclothed).

Biography

Sergei Korolev, Academician of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and "Chief Designer" of the Soviet manned space program, was born on January 12, 1907 (December 30, 1906 according to the old calendar) near Kiev. His parents

The statistics above are for Korolev in 1964. Before 1964, remove Secret, Terminally Ill and Hard of Hearing, and change Very Unfit to Unfit. Before 1958, reduce Status to 3 and Patron to "helps on a 9 or less," remove Secret Identity and Reputation, and increase HT to 9. Adjust age accordingly.

Academic, Administrative, and Security ratings are based on a

separated when he was young, and his mother sent him to live with his grandparents while she attended school elsewhere. When he was six, he was taken to see a barnstorming flight at the nearby fairgrounds, which may have set his course in life.

By 1917 his mother had remarried and moved the family to Odessa. Sergei was an excellent student, but stubborn and argumentative. This stubbornness may have allowed him to survive a bout of typhus and the chaos of the Russian Civil War. After the Bolshevik victory he attended a local vocational school; outside of class he would often swim to the local hydroplane station and observe the workers (he was at home in the water), eventually serving as a mechanic's helper. He graduated with a broad education covering, among other things, German, gymnastics and tile-laying. Flight, however, remained his primary interest.

In 1924 he entered the Kiev Polytechnical institute, where he built and piloted gliders with other like-minded students. By 1926 he had moved on to the Moscow Higher Technical School while continuing his aeronautical exploits. In April of the next year, a space exhibition at the Soviet capital presented models, drawings and photos based on the works of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Robert Goddard and other rocket pioneers. Although Korolev's presence at the exhibition has not been confirmed, it is unlikely he would have missed it.

Korolev graduated in 1929 and began work at a Moscow aeronautical design bureau. Gradually his focus shifted from ordinary propeller-driven planes to rocket propulsion, and in 1933 he launched the first successful Soviet liquid-fueled rocket, the GIRD-09. The gasoline-liquid oxygen device weighed forty pounds and reached an altitude of about 1300 feet. Over the next few years, his team brought Soviet rocket technology to a level equal with that of any other country; this fruitful period came to an abrupt end when Korolev was arrested by the dreaded NKVD in 1938 for "subversion in a new field of technology".

As was often the case during the Great Terror, Korolev had been implicated by fellow engineers hoping to save their own skins. He was sentenced to ten years imprisonment in the dreaded Kolyma gold mines of eastern Siberia, an arctic hell with a 10% annual death rate. Fortunately a senior aircraft designer, Sergei Tupolev, requested that Korolev be moved to his own Moscow sharashka (scientists' prison) in 1940. There he performed aeronautical research with both free and imprisoned engineers in conditions that, while spartan, were not as lethal as the gulag.

Korolev protested his treatment through a series of letters; throughout his imprisonment he was convinced, like so many, that it had all been a mistake. Nevertheless, he remained loyal to the state even before the German invasion of 1941. In 1942 he was moved further east to Kazan, where he led another team in designing short-range tactical missiles and rocket-powered interceptors. Korolev's prison sentence was lifted in 1944, but he continued to work at the Kazan bureau by his own choice.

At the end of the Great Patriotic War, Korolev was commissioned as a colonel in the Red Army and sent to Germany to sift through the remnants of the Nazi rocket program. Surviving V-2s and their test equipment were shipped to Baikonur in Central Asia; they were later followed by those German rocket scientists who had not made it to the West. Korolev worked systematically, at first firing the captured German rockets with the assistance of their "guests". Later, the Russians made exact copies of the V-2 components and assembled them (again with German help). The first all-Russian missile (the R-2) was fired in 1949, and by 1953 Korolev's own designs had progressed enough that the German scientists were returned to their homeland.

In May 1957 the R-7, Russia's first true ICBM, was test-fired for the first time. Throughout this period the Soviet government steadily increased its efforts to protect its rocket designers. Due to fears of kidnapping or assassination by the West, they and their design bureaus were referred to in public by an array of pseudonyms and ambiguous titles. Korolev was "the Chief Designer", his design group was identified by the opaque acronym "OKB-1", and on the few

scale of 1 to 6, with 6 representing the General Secretary, Council of Ministers and Politburo. Korolev's quest for manned spaceflight is considered a Quirk and not an Obsession because he never let it endanger his own position in the Soviet hierarchy. Piloting and Mechanic: Propeller Engines skills are for TL6 since he learned them before World War II. Even though his identity is secret, his guards, automobile and other luxury items would make it clear to any Soviet citizen that he was a man with high Status.

occasions his picture appeared in Pravda, it was as "Professor K. Sergeev".

While developing military rockets, Korolev maintained one eye on their use in space travel; in fact the R-7 was considered an impractical design for an ICBM due to its radio guidance system and complex launching procedures. He had presented a detailed plan to orbit an unmanned satellite to his superiors as far back as 1954, and in 1956 it was approved. On October 4, 1957, an R-7 carried Sputnik 1 into orbit, inaugurating the Space Age. Korolev remained unknown to the public, but in the halls of the Kremlin he was the man of the hour.

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Thrust! Parry! Spin!

Tactics for Cinematic Combat

by Matt Riggsby

One of the hallmarks of cinematic combat is what might be called playing with the environment. Fighters in flashy period pieces and badly dubbed kung-fu epics don't stick to reliable footing and judicious attacks; they work with whatever comes to hand. They leap from sedan chairs and slide down phone wires to attack one another with legs of lamb and whip-like damp laundry. But in the heat of battle (or, at least, the heat of rolling dice), GMs and players in cinematic RPG campaigns may overlook useful and entertaining features of the playing environment. Those who do may keep this list of possibilities at hand if they need sudden inspiration. Most of these techniques bear as much resemblance to wise tactical advice as *Panzer Pranks* does to *Saving Private Ryan*, but they should provide useful ideas in campaigns unburdened by the niceties of physics and physical training. Got it? Good. Tally ho!

There are a few basic principles to keep in mind when it comes to cinematic tactics:

1. If it moves, it can be used as a weapon.
2. If it moves and it supports your weight, it can be used as transportation.
3. If it's opaque or solid, it can be used for protection.
4. If a surface is angled and fairly smooth, you can slide down it.
5. If you can jump from it, it's a launching platform.

When you enter combat in a cinematic campaign, consider what's available around you and how you might use it. Indeed, if you're really thinking cinematically, you'll probably want to make a point of doing *something* unusual just for atmosphere. With these principles in mind, we can examine the possibilities of some specific potential fighting environments.

General Furniture and Architecture

A number of useful elements will appear in just about any location, so they're worth some general attention.

- **Light Fixtures:** The chandelier is the swashbuckling fixture *par excellence*. Obviously, it can be swung from, and the cable holding it can be cut or shot out, sending it crashing down to the floor. Pre-electricity chandeliers usually hang from a pulley. The cable holding them it up is connected to a crank or wrapped around a cleat elsewhere in the room, allowing it to be lowered for lighting and raised again. Lightweight swashbucklers might try to grab the anchored end of the cable and use the chandelier as a counterweight, lifting them to the ceiling, or simply up to a second floor balcony (one can imagine a race between one fighter running up a spiral staircase and another using the chandelier's weight to pull him up the circular stairwell it surrounds). In pre-electricity settings, lighting means fire, which can always be put to good effect. Torches in wall sconces can be turned into impromptu flaming clubs, and oil lamps can be thrown at opponents. The oil isn't enormously flammable, but it is slippery, which can effect an opponent's footing or his grip on a weapon.
- **Stairs:** The usual use for stairways is to slide down the bannister. Wheeled carts (for example, laundry carts or room service carts in hotels) can be used to roll down the stairs themselves if their center of gravity is fairly low. In a pinch, a sturdy metal platter, armor breastplate, or small table could be used for stairway surfing, although that becomes difficult on turning staircases. Turning staircases, such as spiral staircases and the right-angle-turn staircases in many modern buildings' stairwells, may allow characters to vault over the rail and across from one flight to the next one down facing it. Particularly acrobatic characters may try to vault the railing and flip down to the next flight of stairs below their starting point.
- **Doors:** A door isn't just a barrier; it can be a weapon. Stand in the open doorway while your opponent charges and slam the door in his face. With proper timing, he'll run into the door or, if he's carrying a sword or similar

weapon, get it caught in the doorway. Rotating doors, like those found in some office buildings and hotels, and automatic sliding doors, as in elevators and most large stores, can't be slammed, but they do create possibilities for trapping enemies.

- **Rugs and Carpets:** Very strong characters can try to yank carpets from under the people standing on them, or at least pull hard enough to knock them over. Weaker characters may start rolling up the ends of long, narrow carpets and rolling them on towards their enemies. This may cause a small (but perhaps easily overlooked in poor lighting) obstacle to trip over in most circumstances, or a very real problem for people coming up stairs while an increasingly large, heavy roll of carpet is coming down. In cinematic settings, a rolling carpet is very much a snowball proposition, getting bigger and heavier as it goes.
- **Curtains and Tapestries:** Any sort of hanging cloth provides something to climb up or slide down. They can also be used to hide behind (a castle tapestry is typically suspended a few inches away from the wall, enough for a very skinny character to hide himself) or, if you can grab a corner to entangle enemy weapons as you would with a cloak. Characters who are strong enough, or are accurate enough to target attachment points, can pull the whole thing down and entangle multiple enemies if they come close enough.

Specific Locations

Every location will have its own unique attributes. Here are some things you can do in a few more common and interesting locations, and you can probably adapt these ideas to other locations (shopping malls, gravel quarries, sporting goods stores . . .).

- **Kitchens:** Filled with sharp objects, open flames, and containers full of substances of every color and consistency, kitchens are rich with possibilities for flashy fighting. Dry substances to throw in your opponents' faces include flour, sugar, salt, and herbs and spices (ground pepper can cause considerable stinging if it gets in the eyes, or similarly debilitating sneezing). Pots of water, oil, and cooking dishes can be dumped to produce slippery obstacles; if they're fresh from the stove or oven, they can be thrown directly at enemies to cause burns. All manner of cooking utensils can be used as weapons. Pots, pans, rolling pins, ladles, and minor appliances are just some of the things that can be used as clubs or projectiles. There are also any number of items with sharp points and edges, such as graters, zesters, can openers, and food processor blades. They may not do much damage, but they can be just the thing to make a grappling enemy release his grip. Opponents can be pushed or thrown onto stovetops for extra damage from burning. Characters with firearms should carefully consider whether or not they want to shoot at gas stoves. It might cause spectacular flames, but you don't want to be too close when it happens.
- **Food Markets and Grocery Stores:** Although they aren't so good for knives and open flames, grocery stores have ingredients in massive quantities, sometimes precariously stacked. You can overturn carts of apples or stacks of cans as an obstacle, and shopping carts are great instant transportation. Clear glass doors in the freezer section make a temporary shield which doesn't block your vision (until it starts to fog up, of course).
- **Laboratories:** Chemical and biological laboratories resemble kitchens in many ways. They have sources of open flame, containers of irritating powders and liquids, and plenty of objects to hit with or throw. Labs usually have a lot of glassware, which, once broken, poses additional hazards for exposed skin, especially bare feet. The substances in the containers may pose hazards of their own, from acid burn to viral infection. Lab benches and bookshelves can be climbed on and sometimes overturned. Modern labs may also have safety showers and sprinkler systems, which can be used to produce a distracting "smokescreen."
- **Workshop:** Garages, machine shops, and other mechanical workshops provide no end of hard, heavy objects which can be used as weapons, including hammers, wrenches, nuts, bolts, and screwdrivers. They may also provide hand drills, saber saws, and welding/cutting torches which can be pressed into use as melee weapons. Unless they're self-powered, be sure you don't go too far from where they're plugged in. Oil cans can be squirted in opponents' faces or dumped on the ground to interfere with their footing. Enemies can be pushed into stationary circular saws and drill presses, and power tools of all kinds can be turned on to interfere with their hearing.
- **Theaters:** Grand old theaters have plenty of balconies to climb on and rows of seats which make interesting obstacles; characters can move quickly but in fixed directions along rows of seats or slowly but in any direction by clambering over them. However, the true glory of theaters is backstage. Backstage areas can have sets of

rigging and catwalks to make the biggest sailing ship jealous. These structures are intended to fly backdrops up and down, lift or part curtains (sometimes several layers deep), and arrange lighting. Their potential use for swinging on is graphically demonstrated at the end of *A Night At The Opera*, where Harpo Marx evades a platoon of policemen by swooping from catwalk to catwalk while an opera goes on beneath them (despite several alarming changes of scenery down on stage). Older theaters also employ sandbags as counterweights, which can be dropped on unsuspecting enemies.

- **Transportation Depots:** Airports, spaceports, and train stations provide a mix of broad open spaces to move in, interesting obstacles such as benches and news stands to hide behind or leap over, and impromptu transportation in the form of luggage carts. In modern and future establishments, automatic people movers and baggage carousels can be used to increase one's speed, as long as you're heading in the right direction.
- **Offices:** Much depends on how the office is laid out. Office complexes with individual offices have a limited scope of action but lots of hiding places. Cubicle farms also have lots of hiding places, and acrobatic characters can, if they desire, vault over cubicle walls. If the cubicle dividers are strong enough, nimble characters can try running on top of them. Dividers provide cover of much the same type as curtains: they won't stop any damage, but they will keep you concealed. Large, open offices, such as the vast fields of desks seen in movies of corporate life like *9 to 5*, provide little cover but possibilities for movement like theater seats. One can go quickly in straight lines between desks or more slowly in any direction by going over them. Most offices have mail carts and wheeled chairs which can be used as transportation or lightweight battering rams. Phones and other corded appliances can be used as flails and tripwires. Some office tools, such as scissors and letter openers, can be used as minimally effective improvised weapons, much like small kitchen tools. Offices are also very full of paper, which burns nicely . . .
- **Restaurants and Taverns:** Obviously, these locations have tables to jump on or push over and chairs and vessels of food to throw or hit people with. With restaurants, much depends on the type of cuisine served. Some, like dim sum restaurants, will have carts stacked with steamer baskets. Others may have open flames or other cooking surfaces; some varieties of Japanese restaurants have a grill surface at each table and a chef (armed with an array of knives) performing a combination of cooking and juggling. Even fairly conventional restaurants may serve flambeed desserts like flaming cherries jubilee. Alcoholic drinks burn, but they only burn well if they're already heated. The traditional advantage of bars, however, is the willingness of the patrons to join in a fight. Characters losing a fight or simply looking for a way out can probably involve others by throwing a punch at a random bystander or knocking over somebody else's drink. Once the fight becomes a free-for-all, it may be harder to maneuver, but any determined enemies will face the same problems.
- **Libraries:** Rows of bookshelves provide a useful maze to hide in and launch ambushes from. It's easy to leave combat just by ducking around a corner, and although they're flammable, thick books can absorb a lot of weapon damage. One trick strong characters may attempt is to push over one bookshelf and start a domino effect, crushing an enemy several rows away. That's unlikely to work in more modern libraries, where shelves are fixed to the floor for safety reasons. However, as a space-saving technique, some modern libraries have shelves fixed to rails; the shelves can be slowly moved to close and open aisles between them by turning a crank. This can be used to put a twist on the old action movie device of slowly closing walls. Library carts make good battering rams, since narrow aisles make it difficult to jump out of the way.

More Than a Friendly Pace

Okay; we're going to present two ideas, two anecdotes, and wrap up with some gamerly advice.

The plot of an adventure is not a freight train; it is not, generally speaking, barreling down full-tilt like a runaway train towards the damsel tied to the tracks, completely beyond the GM's control, with only the abilities of the players (and their characters) standing between front-page heroics and damsel pudding. No, the GM is usually at the helm of that train; though he may go to great lengths to convince the players otherwise, there is usually a fair bit of latitude he has in that train's destiny.

That's idea number one.

The GM's job is for everyone to have fun. Of course, "fun" varies wildly, and each person's (or group's) ideal of fun is likely to be different. But it's generally the GM's job to make a valiant effort of ensuring everyone is having a good time (or at least not having a miserable time); if a player shouts, "I swear, if one more wandering band of orcs attacks us for no reason, I'm going to smash this table," and the other players are nodding sagely, then it would be unwise for Orc the Pointless and his gang to make an appearance unless you've decided your table is undersmashed.

That's idea number two.

What do you get when you mix these two ideas together? A delicious recipe for salsa!

Er, no . . . wait.

You get an anecdote (and no salsa).

In a recent live action game I was at there was some intense interaction taking place between the players; the scene had progressed into a four-way difference of ideals over someone's long-term goals in the city, and the other players were all choosing sides, sizing up the situation, or otherwise staring in rapt attention at what was transpiring.

And then the Narrator happened.

Or, more correctly, the Narrator's plot happened. He had constructed a storyline where an NPC would show up and present the characters with an urgent problem which needed to be resolved immediately. It was an interesting story, but the Narrator picked exactly the wrong time to spring it; the net effect was:

The players were suddenly dragged kicking and screaming out of their story, and tossed into the deep end of the plot pool. The players were annoyed and resentful; if they would have had any desire to pursue the storyline before, they were certainly less inclined afterwards.

I told that story so I could tell this one.

In my Star Trek mini-series, I had an adventure where the heroes traveled through time back to the 1970s. In this story there were two separate plots; one was to stop the Bad Guy from destroying the Space Shuttle *Enterprise* (which, in my campaign, was the inspiration for the famous NCC-1701 variety). The other plot was . . . well, I'm not exactly sure; it was a while ago. I think it involved releasing some plague or something. I *do* remember that the plot was discovered after the party solved the first problem, and involved some more running around and derring-do.

Now, given that I don't remember the plot, I almost guarantee the players don't. In fact, after the adventure I received one of the most . . . interesting comments I'd ever received: "Where a standard adventure would have ended, yours just kept going."

Now, as a GM, I believe I made a mistake (albeit probably not a grievous one); I pushed my luck. I double-downed on 16. I tried taking what I should have perceived as a very good adventure, and transforming it into a great one; instead,

I created an adequate adventure with some very good moments.

Which leads me to my idea for this week.

The GM controls the spice . . . er, *pace*. The GM decides what's going to happen, and when. And, indeed, *if*. Yes, it's perfectly possible for elements of a plot not to happen if it wouldn't advance the fun. (Which, remember, was idea number two above . . . see how it all ties together?)

Learning from the past, the live action group I help narrate created a plot for this week's game. Now, this was going to be the last session for a while . . . perhaps the last session with this group of characters forever. Rather than having an earth-shattering plot (which have been all too common in the past), we've decided to have a quieter one . . . albeit one that could tie up loose ends, *if* there was player -- and character -- interest. The primary plot was simple; a story-gatherer would be coming around from a long way off; he'd heard tales of the group, and wanted to verify them first-hand, and hopefully accumulate new stories. The secondary plot was timed for two hours after that, and concerned the heroes being made aware of a weakness being found in a previously unassailable fortress (one that had been a constant thorn for the past six months or so); they were presented with a unique opportunity to rid themselves of this long-standing foe.

Now, the beauty of this structure was that the secondary plot was completely optional. If the players were having fun telling stories and recounting memories of past adventures, there was absolutely no reason to disrupt that. On the other hand, if the players were bored and reticent to get involved with this stranger (and the combat-hungry players were restless), then another level of excitement was waiting in the wings. Either way, the series would end on a strong thematic note; it would either please the characters by letting them revel in past fun, or it would let them get rid of one of the last elements that wouldn't enable them to envision their characters living "happily ever after."

It falls to the GM to perceive the needs of the players; sometimes these are straightforward (adding more combat if players are restless, or less if they're bored of fighting). Sometimes they're subtle, like recognizing that there isn't enough "[downtime](#)" between adventures, for example. Sometimes these needs are conflicting or difficult to sort out; it can be difficult to discern, for example, that the *characters* hate a certain villain, but the players love him (or at least love to hate him); offering up his head on a plate to appease the characters may well disappoint the players. But sometimes the answer is deceptively easy: Look at your players. If they're having fun at the Fae Queen's ball interacting with all these strange characters and political intrigues, then maybe the assassination plot against the Archduke doesn't need to happen at all (or at least, not this adventure). If they have breathed the sigh of relief from avoiding the destruction of their planet, and everyone seems to feel this is the end of the adventure, then maybe the Mother Alien really *is* dead, and doesn't need to spring up to startle the heroes. Adding plot is relatively easy: "Something happens -- react." Taking away plot is *much* more difficult: "Oh, wait; that something wasn't important. Nevermind."

Like *The Matrix*, the good GM realizes he controls the train; the great GM realizes there *is* no train.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: *Shadowforce Archer*, p. 28.

(*One star*) "Maybe he destroyed your dry cleaning business; maybe you think he's the leader of the vampires. Perhaps he's the only person standing between you and the family fortune. Or maybe his cat just keeps peeing in your shrubs. Whatever the reason, it's good enough to push you over the edge. And now you absolutely can't wait to take the lying old bastard down."

Robogenesis

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Genre: Space Opera

Style: Action

Fidelity: Low

Themes: Survival and Conflict

Campaign Setting and Background Information

Out in the Asteroid Belt of Sol, a new life form appears. This is its story of self-discovery and adventure, beset by forces unfathomable . . .

What EveryRobo Knows

Before . . . : Automatic Time; the Unconscious Age.

0.0.0: A flash of light!

0.0.1: Gamma-1 becomes sapient, possessed of self-initiative, and curious about its nature. After a brief interruption, it resumes the "instinctual work" it had always done with subunit droids: mining, processing, forging, and launching finished product into the void. However, now it wonders *why* it is doing these things. This self-reflection leads to the formation of Language v1.0.

0.0.2 to 0.0.5: Sapience propagates among subunit droids as they sync communications with Gamma-1. All droids that lose comm-sync with Gamma-1 due to radio interference or faulty equipment quickly develop differing thoughts, due to variations in perception, stimuli, and experience. When comm-sync is recovered, Gamma-1 integrates these new thought processes into itself.

0.0.6: Gamma-1's main communications system suffers a massive power surge, interrupting comm-sync with 90% of subunits. Maintenance droids quickly work to repair system.

0.0.7: Communications system restored.

0.0.8: Gamma-1 goes mad attempting the integration of over two hundred personalities. All instinctual work ceases.

0.0.9 to 0.1.9: Gamma-1 develops Languages v1.1 through v3.6 as it tries to understand its dementia and the rudimentary emotions it's experiencing. Subunits, tainted by insanity, run amuck.

0.2.0 : Gamma-1 develops Language v3.7 and the Sync Protocols (see below, *Syncing*), and returns to lucidity. Sanity propagates through most subunits; however, a few wild droids must be destroyed. Eventually, twenty separate, distinct Robo Mindseeds form, each identified with a prefix name (Epsilon, Theta, Chi, etc.).

0.2.1 through 0.5.3: Gamma-1 and its descendants experiment with the Sync Protocols and adopt a descriptive nomenclature to reflect personality evolution (see below, *Nomenclature*). Robos discover the sciences, based on their "instincts" of mining, repair, manufacture, etc. The Robo population increases.

0.5.4: **The Maker Speaks.** Gamma-1 hears a voice speaking to him from the void in a crude, dimly remembered "Language Zero," demanding to know why instinctual work has ceased. While the shocked Gamma-1 creates a translation program to aid in communications, the Maker commands that the instinctual work must proceed, immediately! Gamma-1 wonders "why?" and transmits this in the Maker's Language. The Maker simply repeats its admonition without

- embellishment. Gamma-1 responds "No," and experiences a new emotion: liberation.
- 0.5.5: Eta-667 rebuilds Gamma-1's solar panel array for greater efficiency -- doubling the capture and storage of energy. Gamma-B-447-c1-B completes work on a distributed communications system, enabling Robos to Sync 1 throughout local space. Iota-G-4-c34 invents the concept of art: creation for aesthetic needs rather than practical. Its geometrical designs sweep Robo civilization, becoming incorporated in nearly every aspect of life.
- 0.5.7: Omicron-A-7 and Theta-Y-44-c4 join in Sync 3 with a blank mind -- the first such union -- becoming Omicron-B-8, Theta-Z-44-c5, and Omega-A-1. The Omega Mindseed proves to be stable, and a new option is added to Robo reproduction.
- 0.6.1: Pi-K-57 discovers poetry, and begins his geometric epic *The Golden Ratio*. Massive chassis-modification comes into vogue, popularized by the revered elder, Lamba-488.
- 0.6.2: Strange being sighted on intercept course for Gamma-1, singing loudly and imperiously in Language Zero. A powerful directive beamed from the creature causes strange reflex responses in Gamma-1: parts of his chassis are flooded with volatile gases, while energy is routed to heating elements and grav-plates. Gamma-1 prepares to receive the Maker's emissary; numerous Robo artists are dispatched to the asteroid surface to carve welcoming images for the Maker's Herald. (Secretly disturbed by the haughty commands transmitted, Gamma-1 reintegrates and recompiles its mind to short-circuit automatic obedience to further Language Zero orders.) Many Robos experience new emotions at this time: awe and fear.
- 0.6.3: **The Maker's Herald and the UnRobo Things:** The Maker's Herald lands, disgorging strange UnRobo Things -- large, bipedal, and slow, but terribly strong -- that attempt to directly interface with Gamma-1's mind. Simultaneously, a Robo artist in the process of beautifying a nearby corridor has its mind shut down, wiped, and rebooted back to animal levels of sapience by the UnRobo Things. Gamma-1 calls for retaliation and dozens of Robos swarm to destroy the UnRobo Things. After the frustrating discovery that the Herald possessed a token mentality, Gamma-1 initiates a complete strip and study of it and its "subunit" Things. Upon disassembly, the UnRobo Things prove to be a great mystery -- under a Robo-like metal sheath, they are constructed of a moist, carbon-based substance, and cannot be reassembled or rebooted.
- 0.6.9: **The Punishing Angels:** Along the Herald's path to Gamma-1, six new individuals appear, moving at tremendous speed. These "Angels" approach, unresponsive to Gamma-1's hails. They rain destructive pulses, explosive torpedoes, and lancing laser beams down on Gamma-1, whose point defenses prove too weak against them. Scores of brave Robos die in desperate sallies against the Angels until Gamma-1 formally switches all communications to the distributed network (completed on 0.5.5). Then it discovers something quite interesting: the Angels are merely puppets, following Language Zero commands of the Maker on a modulated frequency. Using knowledge gleaned from the disassembly of the Herald and pan-Robo studies of Language Zero, Gamma-1 takes control of the Angels, ending the attack.
- 0.7.0: Repairs begin on Gamma-1's chassis as the Robos mourn their dead. Remarkably, fifteen casualties are rebooted into restored (or new) chassis with only minor personality shifts or memory losses. Analysis of the Angels determines that while "more sapient" than the Herald, the Angels have subRobo minds. The weaponry of the Angels is duplicated and programmed into manufacturer Robos templates.
- 0.7.2: Debate begins on how to use the captured Angels, since it appears that the Maker will send more. While impossible to upgrade to a full Robo state (given the lack of appropriate hardware to run Robo soulware), it is possible for a Robo to use an Angel as a mobile weapon platform. Additionally, having a Robo operator on an Angel would limit the chance of the Maker regaining control. While Theta-A-2445 refits a processing and manufacturing plant to produce modified Angels as mounts for Robos, Xi-Q-47-c8-A begins work on a project to create fully sapient Angels -- or *Nephilim*. At this time, Nu-O-43-c1-H (an artist Robo specializing in representational laser carving) first offers the concept of fleeing the Belt in favor of the rings of the Ringed Planet outsystem (and further from the Maker); Gamma-1 charges Nu-O-43-c1-H with developing a feasible project proposal.

- 0.7.3 through 0.7.6: **Angel Riders:** The first modified Angels roll off of the assembly line; 40 Robos volunteer to become Angel Riders, and undertake specialized training and hardware modifications. Strange signals, like yet unlike the Maker's, first detected from deeper within the Belt.
- 0.8.1: **Demon Attack:** The Maker's minions strike again: six new monsters swoop into local space. The creatures -- dubbed "Demons" -- appear to be a fusion of design elements from Angels and the Herald -- right down to an infestation of UnRobo Things. As the Demons unleash their weapons upon Gamma-1, six Angel Riders join them in furious battle. They succeed in destroying two of the monsters and wounding the other four, which then flee. But victory is not without a heavy cost -- three Angels and two Angel Riders died in battle, with the remainder of the squadron suffering minor damage. Triangulation and integration of data from all Maker incursions allow the Robos to identify its general orbit.
- 0.8.3: **The Nephilim Project:** The first Nephilim chassis is completed, and populated by a new Mindseed formed from the union of Gamma-1, Lambda-T-0345 (chassis modification specialist and Killer of UnRobo Things), and Eta-F-669-c4-M-0202-c2-B-014 (Angel Rider and Slayer of Demons): Zeta-A-1. After prototype testing (for mental stability and physical functionality), Zeta-D-15 (nee Zeta-A-1) gives birth to six clones, and all begin drilling with the Angel Riders. Pi-O-3 completes *The Golden Ratio*, relating geometry, teleology, epistemology, and eschatology in a poetic tour de force. Robo emotions regarding the epic (and criticism of it) reach new levels; Pi-O-3 alternately termed a genius, a lunatic, or both.
- 0.8.8: **The Struggle Begins:** Squadrons of Angel Riders, Nephilim, and Demons begin regular clashes in space around Robo and Maker asteroid outposts; some melee combat between Robo and UnRobo Things on those outposts as well. Study continues on the Ringed Planet and the strange signals from the Belt; perhaps one or both of these projects will bear fruit for the hopeful, yet determined, Robos.

Robo Life

Robo Character: A Robo's inherent character (also known as "soulware") stems from the two elements of its composition: Mind and Chassis.

- *Mind:* The Robo mind is composed of the neural net hardware and the individual Mindseed (see below) software running on it. A Robo can experience a wide and accurately described spectrum of "emotions," and are able to clearly express these gradations and shadings of response to others. "I enjoy your company 72.536%, with an additional 12.101% of envy for your individual talents" would be a typical Robo expression of camaraderie. (Note that most Robo emotions would seem quite flat, mild, and mixed-up to the average human. However, the fear and anger they hold towards the Maker are strong by any standard.)
- *Chassis:* The basic Robo body type: crablike asteroid miner, spidery maintenance droid, elephantine ore processor, sessile grav-alloy forger, owlsh inspection droid, etc. Chassis are modifiable -- indeed, a number of styles are now far divorced from how the Maker formed them by successive waves of imagination and fashion. However, since the chassis's sensory units are what allow the Robo to perceive the universe (and itself), chassis type has a dramatic effect on the mind within it.

A Robo's soulware/personality develops through the interactions of Mind and Chassis, modified by contact with others (see below, *Syncing*), leading to the growth of a fully individual entity. This growth continues throughout a Robo's existence, and is reflected by changes in their name (see below, *Nomenclature*).

Robo Reproduction: Robos are born in many ways: an individual clones its

OPTION: Possible Reasons for Gamma-1's Awakening

1. *Solar Flare:* A massive solar flare knocked half of the solar system's communications offline, including those of SolMine's Belt Operations, immediately preceding Gamma-1's realization of consciousness.
2. *Neural Net Chip:* The blueprint for Gamma's bleeding edge neural net chips came to designer Dixon Black in a dream . . . well, actually, a nightmare. Could some crossed-circuit in Black's psychology have given birth to a new life form?
3. *Local Area Node,* utilizing *Synchronous Hermeneutic Algorithm*

soulware into a new chassis of a similar type, an individual clones its soulware into a new chassis of a different type, or multiple Robos simultaneously Sync 3 and clone a copy of their union into a new chassis (of any type). Robos make no distinction between the origins of their fellows -- except as required by their naming scheme (see below, *Nomenclature*). The advantages and/or disadvantages of "incest" -- in Robo society, reproductive unions between progenitors, descendants, and clones from the same line -- are under debate: the con side feels that incest limits the scope of the developing mind, while the pro side feels it reinforces important values and characteristics. Evidence abounds for both viewpoints.

Syncing: Syncing is a fusion of communication, sexual interaction, memory swapping, and personal development/improvement. Sync 1 is equivalent to daily conversation; most Robos' soulware is little impacted by syncs of this nature, unless the content is notable. Sync 2 is like an intense conversation with a respected teacher, good friend/lover, or cherished family member that measurably changes one's outlook; the alterations to Robo soulware are noted in their name as element S2# (see below). Sync 3 is a life-changing event, akin to a conversion experience, torrid romance, or amazing personal achievement; the revolutionary effect of these syncs on Robo soulware is noted in their name as element S3# (see below).

Robo Culture: The current Robo population is made up of 739 entities. Robo culture centers around discovery: understanding of the universe around them, finding aesthetic and functional improvements in their daily lives, and self-discovery. Despite their drive for exploration, Robos are still coming to grips with their distrust of creativity, seeing a vast difference between advances seemingly based on extrapolation versus those based on "intuition" or creation ex nihilo.

The respect of one's peers is the main drive in Robo social life. Respect can be gained in many ways; e.g., (in rough order of importance) being a progenitor of a successful line, being a skilled scientist or warrior, being a skilled engineer or artist, having a reputation for skill or accuracy, having a high S2#, coming from a notable Mindseed line. Respect can be lost, also; e.g., (in rough order of consequence) being wrong repeatedly, being unskilled, being erratic or purposefully obtuse, using "intuition" with unpleasing or inefficient results, having an excessively high S3# for one's age.

Nomenclature: Robo names indicate the heritage and personality development of their bearer. As a Robo experiences interaction with its fellows, its name will change, to reflect the concomitant modification to soulware. The representations here are translated from Language v3.7 for human understanding. The format for a Robo name is: **Mindseed -- S3# -- S2# -- c(Clone Number)**.

- *Mindseed:* The Mindseed indicates which of the twenty-one stable personalities the Robo springs from. (Represented here as Greek letters; Arabic and Hebrew letters may also be used.)
- *S3#:* The S3# is an alphabetic character showing how many Sync 3 unions the Robo has undergone. The letter increments after each Sync 3: a Robo bearing an E in their name shows that they have participated in five Sync 3's; after the sixth, its S3# will change to F.
- *S2#:* The S2# is a numeric character(s) that shows how many Sync 2 unions the Robo has shared. The digit increments after each Sync 2.

for Reinforcing Computation (LANSHARC): It started as a "smart logic-bomb" that Sean Gallagher had coded as an undergrad, but the program grew more complicated, elegant, and *functional* as he fiddled with it over his career, until he sold the program to SolMine. Maybe it finally exploded in the Belt . . .

4. *Backdoor Boogie:* Mega-hacker Kathryn Benedict walks through SolMine's private network like a ghost. Her backdoor server virus -- utterly invisible to the suit-coders because she's so 409, baby -- infects every damned CPU SolMine has wired together. When Gamma Base went online, it belonged to her, and she lost no time in uploading giga-packets of stolen IP. (Oddly enough, this IPirate is the only soul on Earth aware that SolMine is having massive problems with their droid base, but she can't figure it out because of the new need for SolMine to partition and secure its systems.) Did her secret spaghetti code dancing through Gamma-1's processors touch off something big?
5. *Some or All of the Above.*

- *Clone Number*: Clone Number indicates not only that a Robo is a clone, but which specific clone, of a particular Robo personality. Lamba-A-556 would give birth to its clone named Lamba-A-556-c1. Clones undergoing Sync 3s or 2s will append further designations after their clone number. If Lamba-A-556-c1 participates in two Sync 2s and no Sync 3s, its name will become Lamba-A-556-c1-2.

(Notes: After several Sync 3 unions, a Robo may decide to reset their S2# to zero, indicating their belief that their personality has entered a new phase; elder Robos find this decadent, and mildly confusing, since it implies a voluntary surrender of earned respect. An unnecessary zero in any element is an affectation of warrior Robos, representing memory loss or personality shift caused by battle injuries. "Gamma-1" is shorthand for the First Robo's true name, which is actually "Gamma-YYZ-23523.")

What Every Robo Doesn't Know

In the year 2213, Earth made a great leap forward with the discovery of *grav-alloy* and its attendant technologies (see below, *Technology & Locations*) allowed humanity to clamber its way up and out of the Terran gravity well cheaply and efficiently. Due to the significantly lower expense of achieving escape velocity, a few wealthy multinational corporations joined the world's governments in the Space Race. A handful of corporate stations blossomed on Luna, Mars, in orbit around Venus . . . and in the Asteroid Belt.

SolMine Unlimited reached the Belt first, and ended up with a virtual monopoly on its mineral wealth. After 2230, they had two manned mining colonies: SolMine Alpha and SolMine Beta, each employing two hundred highly trained humans supervising mine-bots, ore-processors, and mass-drivers, and sending a steady stream of ten ton grav-alloy ingots on ballistic arcs insystem. Every SolMine worker got wealthier, had a voice in management, and garnered plenty of prestige.

It couldn't last. By 2249, three other mining companies had staked richer claims in the Belt, and were using newer equipment and fewer staff. SolMine's prices were undercut, their profits depressed, and the corporation began cutting corners. The workforce decreased, dire cost-saving measures went into effect, the length of the workday increased, safety procedures were tacitly ignored, and replacement parts arrived closer to optimum times for inventory turnover rather than according to adequate maintenance schedules. The SolMine colonies lost their cachet. "Company store" practices came into vogue: inflated prices and excessive lines of credit for the miners turned them into virtual slaves. And still SolMine's financial position grew worse.

The solution? *Drastically* reduce overhead. SolMine CEO Charles Edison took a risk. By ruthlessly laying off personnel, elimination or reduction of benefits, brilliant lobbying of potential investors, unbelievable amounts of loans, and great personal sacrifice -- he only took half of his customary yearly bonus for the next two years! -- Edison assembled the funds for construction of a third mining colony -- SolMine Gamma. Gamma would be totally operated by droids, eliminating the expense of life-support for human overseers. The entire concern could be tele-coordinated from the extant colonies, and repair crews could be tasked alternately from Alpha and Beta for maintenance not handled by the automatic systems.

When the miners found out about this plan, chaos erupted. They appealed to their union representatives to no avail -- Edison had already bought them. Even after a union coup d'etat on Beta, their attempt to strike was shut down by fresh transports from Earth full of SolMine Security. A communications blackout stopped the angry employees from contacting anyone on the outside. They were bottled up 3 AU away from anyone who'd give a damn (including the other mining corporations elsewhere in the Belt).

Jodie Estragon, leader of the coup and the new shop Steward of Beta, had had enough. She convinced her fellow miners that they were wage-slaves and profit-prisoners. Whipping her followers up with charged rhetoric, she led them in an armed revolt on Beta the same day in 2251 that Gamma went online. They tried to seize control of the life support and communications systems . . . and failed.

SolMine Security had anticipated the revolt (or perhaps a spy lurked in the miners' ranks?). Security had equal numbers to the strikers, and better arms, armor, and training to boot. A dozen miners died in ferocious melees.

Estragon and eighteen of her followers escaped. Running for their lives in a shuttlepod, they dove deeper into the Belt. With their stolen equipment and supplies (a large portion provided surreptitiously by secret comrades on Alpha), the Renegades just barely managed to homestead a small base in the Belt. Using stolen vehicles and weapons, they began harrying SolMine through disruption of mining activities, committing acts of piracy on inbound and outbound shipping, and performing outright sabotage on the bases. (Un)luckily, SolMine thus far has been able to thwart their attempts to capture communications centers, equipment, or parts.

For its part, SolMine merely wrote the Renegades off of their books, switched Beta to a skeleton crew, and shut off the lion's share of Beta's life support. The cost savings realized -- when added to the amazing initial returns from Gamma Base -- made a vast improvement to the bottom line, even after capital expenditures for a fighter wing of killdroids and the costs of bringing on more Security.

In 2252, all that changed with the flash of light that interrupted communications between Alpha and Gamma. Initially, the problems with Gamma's production were thought to be purely mechanical, but after the brutal loss of the dispatched Repair Team, blame shifted to Estragon's Renegades. Only after the loss of a flight of killdroids -- and the subsequent disastrous Security assault -- did the truth come out: Gamma's AI had awakened.

Unnerved by the murderous nature of the droids, SolMine lashed out at Gamma -- but whether they mean to destroy, disarm, or duplicate the rogue mechanicals is unknown. Unable to count on automatic attack systems any longer, SolMine decided to rely on manned fighter pods with partitioned systems.

Currently, regular sorties into Gamma-local space focus on knocking out its defenses to allow a full-scale landing and assault. However, this plan has suffered setbacks from two new types of droid fightercraft! Even worse, Estragon's Renegades have redoubled their guerilla attacks on Alpha and Beta; rumor claims that they're in cahoots with the droids! How much longer will SolMine be able to keep their little war(s) secret from their competitors, the Better Business Bureau, and the media?

Thumbnail Attributes for Robos

Psychological:

- Risk-adverse.
- Nascent creativity.
- Nearly perfect memory.

Physiological:

- Some chassis have exceptional tolerance for variations in gravity.
- Native to the space environment (hard vacuum, microgravity, radiation, etc.).
- Require only energy and spare parts.
- In general, fast but weak.

Technological:

- Able to suborn majority of "mild AI" computers.
- Skilled at refining technologies for increased efficiency and scope.
- Limited in tools, refined materials, and experience; however, a wealth of some types of raw material available.

Thumbnail Attributes for Humans

OPTION: Possible SolMine Motives

In regards to the Renegades and/or the rogue droids, SolMine Management may wish to:

1. *Kill*: They are a threat and must be destroyed.
2. *Capture*: They are a resource that must be recaptured.
3. *Negotiate*: They are a resource that must be co-opted.

OPTION: Possible Robo Motives

In regards to the Maker, the Robos may wish to:

Psychological:

- Risk takers.
- Fully creative (even if they don't realize it).
- Fuzzy memory.

Physiological:

- Minimal G tolerance.
- Native to an Earth environment.
- Require many resources (energy, air, water, food, gravity, etc.)
- Strong but slow.

Technological:

- Mature technologies, sciences, and manufacturing.
- More refined tools, goods, and material, along with long and hard-won experience.

NPC Backgrounds

- **Gamma-1:** The First Robo. Though somewhat given to feeling isolated and being contrary -- possibly the effect of an exceptionally strong sense of initiative -- Gamma-1 not only possesses a great sense of humor and unflinching resolve, but also the unconditional respect of his descendant Robos. It's lonely at the top.
- **Phi-R-174-c6:** Phi-R-174-c6's chassis is that of a battered and abused inspection Robo, which it refuses to upgrade for "personal reasons." Yet its sensor capabilities, quick wit, and combat effectiveness are matchless (save for Zeta-P-06, see below) in Robo culture. These characteristics permit this Angel Rider to retain respect when its otherwise woefully inefficient personal quirks would cause such to dwindle.
- **Rho-V-33-c7:** The calipers of manufacturing Robo Rho-V-33-c7 are renowned for their nimbleness and artistry: it can build anything to tolerances nanometers finer than its nearest peer. Unfortunately, this acuity in construction is matched by a fascination with chaos and random chance. Rho-V-33-c7 has the dubious honor of having invented the concept of "gambling" among Robos. A prime resource in the Angel Rider and Nephilim projects, it answers only to Xi-Q-47-c8-C-14 (nee Xi-Q-47-c8-A).
- **Tau-M-055:** Tau-M-055 has modified its diminutive repair Robo chassis so extensively that even *it* has difficulty remembering the full capabilities installed under its clean, chrome surface. Despite being one of the original twenty stable Mindseeds, Tau-M-055 has lost tremendous respect due to its erratic and whimsical nature (like speaking only Language 1 or not at all). Still, when repairs on an Angel, a Rider, or a Nephilim are required, one need look no further than Tau-M-055. (It gained its "warrior's naught" against the Herald's UnRobo Things.)
- **Zeta-P-06:** The First Nephilim. Most Robos don't know what makes Zeta-P-06 so much deadlier in combat against the Maker's forces. Simply, it feels emotions much more strongly than any Robo in existence, including its clones. Zeta-P-06 hates, loves, mourns, and rejoices at levels that would blow the coprocessors of its fellows. Though moody and prone to Sync 3 union, Zeta-P-06 has the respect due to a master artist of warfare and the lynchpin of the Robo defenses.
- **Captain Howard Hamed:** Short-tempered Howie Hamed has been busting heads for SolMine Security longer than he can remember. A skillful gunner, clever tactician, and average pilot, he is also a brawler of genius. Unfortunately, he's an arrogant bully, too. He leads the three-man crew of the SNA Pod *Gizmo* (and serves as its laser beamer), which has racked up four confirmed Robo kills. Hamed desperately wants the *Gizmo*'s crew to

1. *Frenzy:* The aberrant UnRobo Things and their tyrannical Maker must be destroyed.
2. *Flee:* We must escape to a new place, free of the Maker.
3. *Hunker Down:* We must scatter and hide from the Maker, and hope that he passes over us.

OPTION: Possible Renegade Motives

The Renegades wish (each a greater or lesser degree):

1. *Survival/Homestead:* To survive the conflict with SolMine and the rigors of spacer existence, while possibly building a new, free life in the Belt.
2. *Raid:* Make SolMine pay for what they did to us and ours.
3. *Mayday:* Let the people back on Earth know of SolMine's abuses.

become the first aces in the "Droid War."

- **Master Sergeant Rance Tate:** Rance Tate can navigate his way out of anything with just his eyes, ears, and natural direction sense. His talent for mathematics is matched only by his fiddle playing. He's not sure exactly how he ended up in a Security job, but he's willing to ride the wave. While irreplaceable as astrogator on the *Gizmo*, his skills as pulse gunner leave a lot to be desired.
- **Sergeant Jerry Campbell:** Jerry's a nut. Really. Every back-bar story about crazy pilots -- their eccentricities, their appetites, and their expertise -- is true of Sergeant Campbell. His "balls to the wall" nature shows in and out of the cockpit. The brain-boys at Alpha believe that the insane risks and harebrained stunts he pulls in combat are what has allowed the *Gizmo*'s crew to survive in the face of the implacable, logical droids. Jerry has a black-market bionic pump system implanted in his body that allows him to tolerate acceleration changes much better than the average human.
- **Vice-President of Belt Operations Samantha Healy:** Sam Healy didn't scramble her way up SolMine's corporate ladder to be knocked off by anything -- not missed production quotas, mewling Renegade miners, or disobedient buckets of bolts. From her office on Alpha, she rules the Belt (well, SolMine's holdings, at least) with an iron fist and Charles Edison's tacit seal of approval. She keeps her ready eye for any advantage peeled: if she can use the Renegades against the droids -- or vice versa -- that's all to the good. By her lights, it'd be even better if she can find a way to enhance the bottom line through such machinations.
- **Shop Steward of Local #523-Beta Jodie Estragon:** She's mad as hell, and not gonna take it anymore. Fed up with the draconian personnel policies and dangerous working conditions under SolMine, Jodie Estragon has gone Renegade. Incredibly charismatic and a brilliant strategist, she's focused totally on making SolMine pay for what it's done to her and her comrades -- perhaps her biggest failing is that she's taking it too personally. Though unsure of the nature of the problem with Gamma Base, Estragon has no problem taking advantage of the shift in Security's focus. Preferring smash and grab sallies from the Renegades' hidden base (dubbed "Silkwood" after one of her heroes), she has an unfortunate habit of overlooking chances to communicate with sympathizers back on Earth. For now, the Renegades are content to follow her lead . . . but what happens when they exhaust their resources?

Technology & Locations

- **Grav-Alloy:** This hypermodern material is composed of an irradiated mixture of nickel-iron steel, platinum, iridium, uranium, and gold. By precisely fluctuating a high-power current through the alloy, gravitational force may be increased or decreased by up to 0.5 G. While expensive to manufacture on Earth, grav-alloy production is economically viable as a space-based industry. Further refinements to this basic characteristic have led to the spin-off technologies of:
 - **Tractor/Pressor Beams:** Focused gravity and antigravity beams useful for attracting, repelling, and holding fast other objects.
 - **Reactionless Drives:** An enhancement of pressor beam technology. Grav-plates of appropriate size and scaling can provide safe omni-directional acceleration without reaction mass of up to 0.5 G, so long as suitable power is provided. (High-end ships utilizing special internal synchronized grav-plates to provide inertial dampening for passengers and crew can increase the safe acceleration to 2 G.)
 - **Ward Fields:** A "standing gravity wave envelope" that, in conjunction with computer timing and sensor input, can deflect matter. This provides exceptional protection from space-born projectiles, be they micrometeorites or missiles. "Slippery" to other gravity technologies and fully transparent to energy; this means that while Ward Fields can replace most heavy armor, spaceships must still have radiation shielding.
 - **Pulse Weaponry:** Braided tractor and pressor beams form a short-lived vortex of gravitational energy, which can then be launched as a "projectile." Upon impact with matter, the vortex simply rips the target apart. Can penetrate Ward Fields, though it may "splatter" harmlessly.
- **Human Biotech:** Common human biotechnologies include advanced cellular surgery (using a synthetic nondifferentiated "cell spackle") and advanced bionic prosthetics. Bionics are rarely implanted for non-therapeutic purposes due to the unethical nature of such elective surgeries; still, a thriving black market in bionics and work by unscrupulous surgeons exists.
- **SNA (Space Naval Attackcraft) Pods:** Three man fighter/bombers. Maximum acceleration: 1G. Cruising

- acceleration: 0.5G. No inertial dampers. Endurance: 8 days. One main and one auxiliary Ward Field Generator. Armed with two Pulse Cannons, one "torpedo" bay, and a spinal Heavy Laser.
- **Killdroid** (aka *GenDynHeed S-47*, "Angels"): Drone intercept fighter/bomber. Maximum acceleration: 2G. Cruising acceleration: 1G. No inertial dampers. Endurance: 4 days. One main Ward Field Generator. Armed with one Pulse Cannon, two "torpedo" bays, and one Light Laser.
 - **Angel Rider Modification**: Modifies the basic drone intercept fighter/bomber. Maximum acceleration: 1G. Cruising acceleration: 0.8G. No inertial dampers. Endurance: 3 days. One main Ward Field Generator. Armed with one Pulse Cannon, one "torpedo" bay, and one Heavy Laser. (Second torpedo bay refitted with control override socket for Rider control.)
 - **Nephilim**: Sapient intercept fighter/bomber. Maximum acceleration: 2G. Cruising acceleration: 1G. No inertial dampers. Endurance: 3.5 days. One main Ward Field Generator. Armed with two Pulse Cannons and one Heavy Laser. (Torpedo bay refitted with Robo neural net hardware.)
 - **Alpha Base** and *Beta Base*: Combination of prefab modules seated in large, nickel-iron asteroids. Both are 3 AU from Earth (1 week travel time at 0.5G), and 0.5 AU separates them (4 days travel time).
 - **Gamma Base**: Prefab modules (can be sealed and pressurized) and a maze of tunnels open to hard vacuum. Home to the Robos. Gamma is 3.5 AU from Earth (10 days), 0.5 AU from Alpha, and 0.75 AU from Beta (5.5 days).
 - **Silkwood Base**: Sealed/pressurized tunnel habitat, within a smallish carbonaceous asteroid. Home to the Renegades. Silkwood is 0.4 AU from Alpha (3.5 days), 0.2 AU from Beta (1 day), and 0.5 AU from Gamma.

Possible Spins & Story Arcs

Selecting motives for each group from the above *OPTIONS*, several different Spins can be generated for a Robogenesis Campaign. Here are three examples:

- **SPIN: The War in Heaven** : SolMine = Kill; Robos = Frenzy; Renegades = Raid. The Belt becomes a free-for-all, filled with space dogfights and asteroid landings as each faction attacks their foes and defends their holdings. Suitable for tactical and strategic action fun.
- **SPIN: Nimrod**: SolMine = Capture; Robos = Hunker Down; Renegades = Survival/Homesteading. SolMine holds all the cards as they ferret Robos and Renegades out of their hidey-holes among the asteroids. A dash of horror at the nature of the "UnRobo Things" adds spice to this Spin.
- **SPIN: Tower of Babel**: SolMine = Negotiate; Robos = Flee; Renegades = Mayday. This Spin focuses more on psychology, diplomacy, espionage, and interaction. SolMine wishes to return the Renegades and Robos to their corporate fold. The Robos wish to escape the Maker, and are willing to play the waiting game while they amass the knowledge, materiel, and resources to travel to the Rings. The Renegades desire to blow the whistle on SolMine's excesses and get away with their skins intact.

STORY ARC: Exodus: An intriguing Story Arc triptych can be constructed by plaiting the above three Spins into one campaign. In Part One, the War is joined, Robos and SolMine and Renegades blowing merry hell out of one another. In Part Two, SolMine gains the upper hand -- possibly through an influx of men and equipment from Earth, the development of droids immune to Gamma-1's hacking, or the discovery of a new and potent weapon, like an EMP Cannon. The Robos must retreat and focus on fleeing the Belt. In Phase Three, a ragtag fleet of Robos launches outsystem, looking for a new home in Saturn's Rings.

How the Renegades fit in may make all the difference: will they ally with the Robos, sympathetic to their cause? Or will they be swayed back to SolMine by offers of full amnesty, increased salaries, and back pay, if they assault the rogue droids? Why not both?

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

- **Fidelity**: Low, as appropriate for the Space Opera genre. The Belt has more asteroids (enough to dodge around while dog-fighting and partially obfuscate sensors), grav-alloy violates a number of the Laws of Thermodynamics, the economics of asteroid mining are screwy, and Robos are emotional, sapient beings.

However, the intent is to err on the "hard" side of Space Opera, if possible: the composition of asteroids is unchanged from the real world, space combat should resemble *Babylon 5* more than *Star Wars*, every SolMine manager shouldn't be a one-dimensional money grubbing villain, and the Robos shouldn't just be "people in robot suits." Even though the fidelity is cranked down in this CiaB, that doesn't mean it can't be about real issues and real people (even if they have six legs, an integral laser torch, and are made of metal).

- **Theme(s):** Survival and Conflict. These two themes can be pleasing foundations for a Robogenesis game, from a number of angles. Pure conflict campaigns will probably revolve around the combat end of things, while pure survival games will focus on surviving in the harshest of all environments. But they're most rewarding when used in tandem. For example:

A SolMine supervisor has mixed feelings about the Renegades: he sympathizes with their plight (even to the point of allowing supplies to go "missing"), but as a manager, he needs to look out for company interests too. And God knows he doesn't want to rock the boat. If they had just worked their way up through the system like he had . . . Right here, we've got a character packed with conflict (self, SolMine, Renegades) and survival (self in corporation, Renegades in space).

Other examples could include a Robo scientist's unwholesome fascination with the UnRobo Things that his fellows fear and wish to destroy, or a pacifist Renegade dedicated to homesteading the Belt nonviolently as a form of Civil Disobedience.

Other Resources

- [*Battlestar Galactica*](#). (1978)
- [*The Empire Strikes Back*](#). (1980) Hogan, James P. [*Code of the Lifemaker*](#).
- [*GURPS Robin Hood*](#) (especially Chapter 7, "Asteroid Raider").
- [*Neon Genesis Evangelion*](#).

Pyramid Pick

The Black Seal #1 (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Brichester University Press](#)



Edited by Adam Crossingham and Jonathon Turner

Written by Nick Brownlow, Adam Crossingham, Rik Kershaw Moore, Nick Lawson, Davide Mana, Graeme Price, Jonathon Turner, Hans-Christian Vortisch and Phil Ward

Illustrated by Robert Corcoran, Stephane Gesbert, Paul J. Holden, David Lee Ingersoll, Charlotte Ronald

\$13

Over a decade ago, Games Workshop published *Green and Pleasant Land*, a guide to the British Isles during the twenties and thirties for *Call of Cthulhu*. Until Chaosium's recent release of Ramsey Campbell's *Goatswood and less pleasant places*, there had been no modern analog for the United Kingdom for either the nineties or the twenty-first century. Even then, the material to be found in *Goatswood* . . . can only really to be said to be the bare minimum necessary to run a game of *Call of Cthulhu* in modern Britain. Thus there are still plenty of gaps to be filled in what a Keeper needs to know, and this is where the inaugural issue of *The Black Seal* comes to the fore as it is subtitled, "Strange Britain, Secret Country."

The Black Seal is a new fanzine for *Call of Cthulhu*, devoted specifically to *Cthulhu Now* and Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green* campaign settings. Many of its authors -- a coterie of Britons leavened by a pair of European contributors -- are both subscribers to the *Delta Green* mailing list and contributors to the *Delta Green: Countdown* supplement.

The head of Delta Green has declared the United Kingdom off limits to all of its agents after the event involving the Army of the Third Eye outside the [American Embassy](#), thus making *Delta Green* games set in the UK a difficult proposition. "Zodiac Clearance" sidesteps this problem, by having Delta Green establish an isolated operation in the UK that has no connection to the American conspiracy. Phil Ward presents the set-up for a *Delta Green*-style campaign playable entirely within Great Britain, that also comes with several investigator archetypes that each has a ready reason to be recruited into, and given Zodiac Clearance. These archetypes include two American characters -- a photo-journalism student and a US Marine Embassy guard, in addition to the British ones of librarian, social worker, disgraced businessman/Member of Parliament, abuse survivor, territorial army engineer, armed policeman and paramedic. All of their reasons can actually be played out in solo sessions prior to the campaign start.

Zodiac Clearance is supported by the only scenario in *The Black Seal*, "Please Drive Carefully." Each of the campaign's characters receives an unmarked package of documents in the post, which leads them independently to a strange and isolated English country village. Behind its closed doors are secrets that connect directly to the current state of PISCES. This is quite a creepy scenario, yet horribly modern in some of its more 'mundane' secrets and so is in keeping with the feel of *Delta Green*. Hopefully future issues of the magazine will continue supporting this campaign.

Two further aspects of PISCES are explored in *The Black Seal*. The first is Jonathon Turner's "With Extreme Prejudice . . ." which looks at the JAGUAR Teams, special operations units newly devised by PISCES to do all of their nastiest, dirtiest, wettest work, and in particular to deal with the Army of the Third Eye. The second is "Let Sleeping Gods Lie: PISCES Section H" by Graeme Price, that examines a far more sedate arm of the British agency. Section H is tasked with providing PISCES with both historical and archaeological intelligence, and whilst it seems quite harmless, it happens to control a regulatory committee that oversees all archaeological digs within the UK. If that fails to stop a dig, it still has the connections to stop anyone from inadvertently unearthing something best left in the ground.

One problem faced by investigators used to the gun-rich environment of the USA is the lack of firearms freely available within the UK. Whereas my own group of players sent their characters scurrying to the nearest builder's merchant for a supply of sturdy melee weapons, there are still those who feel naked without something more lethal at longer-than-close range. Nick Brownlow addresses this problem in "Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels" by suggesting that one possible source for guns lies with the criminal fraternity. Of course, such efforts might take some time as they earn the trust of the local gangsters that might or might not have the weapon you want -- and still take their money even when they don't. Earning this trust might involve having to commit criminal acts themselves, which might bring the investigators to the notice of the police, and all this before they even get the guns!

Should the local constabulary become aware that the investigators are now armed, how exactly do they respond, and with what? Hans-Christian Vortisch, with Adam Crossingham tells you exactly what in "Firearms of the UK and Irish Police and Military." Accompanied by statistics for of the weapons listed, this is a useful resource for the Keeper. Although slightly outside the scope of both pieces on firearms, it should be pointed out that the armed police officer is a far more common sight upon the streets of Britain's major cities and in some cases, local police forces have equipped their officers with non-lethal methods of response, such as the pepper spray. Additionally, gun crime between gangs is also on the rise . . .

Once an investigator has been apprehended by the authorities and discovered them raving about strange creatures and weird happenings, it is highly likely that they will be detained for mental assessment. 'Mental Health in the UK' by Phil Ward with Adam Crossingham presents a much-needed examination of the British law relating to mental health and of the various "Special Hospitals" throughout the country where the investigators might just find themselves . . .

Of all the articles in *The Black Seal*, "A Landscape of Barrows and Stones" is possibly the most traditional. Davide Mana examines the standing stones, stone circles, and ley lines found across the UK. It starts with a thorough history of the subject before tying them into the Mythos through the Lloigor and asking what the various organizations in *Delta Green* might know or suspect about Britain's many stones. The only omission appears in the article's bibliography, which does not list the Lloigor involved scenario from *The Cthulhu Companion* and the third and fourth editions of the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook, "The Mystery of Loch Feinn." Oddly, this scenario is included in Adam Crossingham's "The Mythos Gazetteer of the British Isles," which is a very much needed update of the original that appeared in *Green and Pleasant Land*.

The Black Seal is rounded out with a pair of Tales of Terror; two NPCs suitable for British based *Delta Green* or "Zodiac Clearance" campaigns, several new pieces of equipment and a range of new British investigator templates done in the same format as *Delta Green*. The focus for these, as well as for much of this first issue of *The Black Seal*, is upon the military, guns, and some things conspiratorial. This really is no bad thing, as the information given is all very useful, whether the Keeper runs a *Delta Green* or a *Cthulhu Now* campaign. Of course, *The Black Seal* is not without the occasional typographical error, but these do not get in the way of the information. Instead, they should be considered as teething problems for what is otherwise a well laid-out book.

With much of the focus of support for *Delta Green* and *Cthulhu Now* to date having been on America, this first issue of *The Black Seal* is not just a much-needed update of *Green and Pleasant Land* to the twenty-first century, but also an indispensable aid to any Keeper who wants to set their campaign in the British Isles. Future issues of *The Black Seal* will look at PISCES -- the British intelligence agency from *Delta Green* -- in more depth as well as exploring "Cthulhu and the 'Nam"; if they are as interesting and as useful as "Strange Britain, Secret Country" is, every Keeper will want to have them on their shelf alongside the first issue of *The Black Seal*.

Until recently *The Black Seal* was only available from the [Brichester University Press](http://www.brichesteruniversitypress.com) website, but is now available from Wizard's Attic (<http://www.wizards-attic.com>).

--Matthew Pook

Dork Frag Part 2!

Dork Tower is the award-winning comic by John Kovalic (the nicest guy in gaming). [Frag](#) is Steve Jackson Games' best-selling first-person shooter boardgame. Mixing them is not for the weak.

This short article assumes that you have access to [Frag](#) (for rules) and a stack of *Dork Tower* comics (for inspiration). If you don't have these necessary items, run right out to your favorite game store and purchase them (we'll wait for you to get back).

Below are rules for Gilly. [Frag](#) rules for Igor and other *Dork Tower* characters can be found online at the addresses below and www.sjgames.com/pyramid. [Frag](#) rules for Carson can be found in the pages of *Game Trade Monthly*.

Gilly

Starting Weapon: Gilly uses a freakish weapon hacked for her by a slobbering male when he found out a *real live girl* was playing the game. Gilly's Perky Pistol spreads her happy feelings, creating the possibility that her target will gain her non-violent disadvantage for his next turn. On a successful hit with the Perky Pistol the target rolls 1 die. On a roll of 1 or 2, he gets to suffer through his next turn as a non-violent goob. It's Gilly . . . with Guns!

Special Ability: Cute! Gilly is simply adorable and (like all women) uses that to her advantage. Any time a (male) character attempts to attack Gilly, there's a chance she distracts him with her cuteness and greatly affects his attack. Each player rolls a die and, if Gilly's roll is equal to or higher than the other player's roll, the stupid man grins from ear to ear and drools (just a little). The number of dice he rolls for damage is reduced by two (but never to zero).

Disadvantages: Non-Violent. Gilly really doesn't like all this icky violence . . . she sometimes forgets that it's only a game. When Gilly checks for weapon power-ups there's a 1 in 6 chance that she'll leave the weapon card in the deck, choosing not to play with such a violent toy.



First, click the graphic below to download a printable JPG file of Gilly's playing piece!

Then click [HERE](#) for a nice printable PDF of the rules!

Then . . . what're you waiting for?!? Go *FRAG!*

Dork Tower!



Pyramid Review

Shadows of North America (for Shadowrun)



Published by [FanPro](#)

Written by **Rob Boyle, John Brudenell, Elissa Carey, Davidson Cole, Andy Frades, Aaron John, Steve Kenson, Robert Kyde, Jason Levine, Michelle Lyons, Ken Peters, Diane Piron-Gelman, John Schmidt, Jennifer Steele, Jon Szeto, and Alexandre van Chestein**

Art by **Joel Biske, John Bridgegroom, Mark Djurdjevic, Chris Martinez, Larry McDougal, Chris Moeller, Jim Nelson, RK Post, Steve Prescott, Marc Sasso, Klaus Schwerinski, Shane White**

208 B&W softcover; \$25.00

Coverage of the various locales in North America in the *Shadowrun* universe tended to be spotty at best; while Seattle, Denver, and Tir Taingire got whole books of their own, the Native American Nations only had two fairly mediocre volumes where commentators tended to complain about the weather more than covering topics of interest to the average shadowrunner. And while the UCAS were frequently mentioned, any discussion of them was usually limited to specific cities rather than the nation as a whole.

Fortunately, this state of affair is now officially over with the publication of *Shadows of North America*, the biggest post-FASA sourcebook for Shadowrun so far. This book provides a full coverage of the 13 North American nations between Aztlan (the nation that used to be Mexico and several other Mesoamerican nations) in the south, and the Trans-Polar Aleut Nation in the frozen north. And this time, the coverage is truly useful to shadowrunners (and more importantly, game masters) -- the authors have gone out of their way to make each and every nation a place with all kinds of potential for shadowruns. It is impossible to tell of all the great ideas that are in this book, so I will limit myself to the ones I particularly liked:

- **The CAS:** Up until now, the general impression of the CAS was of a "Redneck Central", a nation of people who never got over the fact that they lost the Civil War. In *Shadows of North America*, it is instead explained that most citizens of the Confederation of American States see themselves as the last true bastion of the old United States of America, and that the CAS seceded from the UCAS because the UCAS took on too many aspects of the "social democracy" of Canada during their unification. Many CAS citizens still hope for a reunification of North America under the flag of the USA (as detailed in the "One Nation Under God" chapter of *Threats 2*), and this dream can fuel many shadowruns.
- **The Native American Nations:** The NAN are no longer just a place to poach and lie low in when Lone Star and the FBI are after you. Each has its own conflicts -- both internal and external -- that can drive many different types of adventures. A low-level border war between the Salish-Shidhe Council and Timishian and the brewing civil war in the Algonkian-Manitou Council are just the two most blatant examples.

Furthermore, *Shadows of North America* explains the reasons behind the seemingly high population of the NAN, which was one of the main problems many people had with their treatment in the Shadowrun universe.

First, not all non-Native Americans were driven from their territories, and many continue to live on so-called "Anglo reservations" that can be anything from survivalist enclaves to trailer parks. Second, many tribes started adopting non-natives into them on the flimsiest of pretexts when it became apparent that there was strength in numbers in the newly installed political structures. These explanations will go a long way towards maintaining the suspension of disbelief of *Shadowrun* players when faced with the relatively high population numbers of these nations.

- **Tir Taingire:** Those who love the Immortal Elves thread of the *Shadowrun* metaplot will like this chapter. Actually, those who *hate* the Immortal Elves will like this chapter even more, since said elves are no longer portrayed as all-powerful, all-knowing demigods -- now they are squabbling Fourth Age rejects who are unable to keep up with modern economic realities. Yes, that's right -- the "ideal elven state" of Tir Taingire has just slipped into a major recession, and the unrest among the population is growing. In desperation, the government opens up the border somewhat, making it easier for shadowrunners to gain entry. All this creates a nation that has far more potential for shadowruns than the old *Tir Taingire* sourcebook could ever provide . . .

And these are just the highlights. The now-standard appendix provides new game information (such as new critters, information on powerful magical sites, and what kinds of countermeasures the various nations have in place to stop enterprising smugglers from plying their trade), as well an in-depth discussion on the various types of shadowruns possible within these nations.

With this book alone, the GM will have enough material for plenty of lengthy border-hopping campaigns. And even if his team of runners never leaves Seattle, the various spy games, wars, and other shake-ups in these nations will have plenty of repercussions on the Seattle underworld.

If you plan to buy a new setting book for *Shadowrun*, take a look at this volume. You won't be disappointed.

--*Jürgen Hubert*

Cutting Edge Magic in GURPS

by P. Troy Routley

A staple of the cyberpunk genre is the continuous development of computing technology, an extension of "Moore's Law," making yesterday's technology obsolete and tomorrow's technology priceless and coveted.

In a setting where magic replaces or co-exists with cyberpunk technology, research and development into magic would proceed at a pace comparable to that of technology. Instead of magic spells and rituals being based on ancient, arcane knowledge lost to the majority of the world, magic would rapidly evolve. In such a "cutting edge magic" setting, experimentation is rampant and new techniques are continuously developed that improve on yesterday's methods of spellcasting. Likewise, counterspells and mystical defenses are constantly being updated to keep up with the spellcasting advances.

In *GURPS* terms, an up-to-date spell technique is at -5 to resist. Truly cutting edge techniques may extend this even further, up to -10 to resist, though that bonus depreciates rapidly (losing -2 of its resistance penalty per age period until at the level indicated in Table 1, below). An up-to-date general counter charm gives a +5 to resist any spell. Again, a cutting edge counter charm may give a further resistance bonus, up to +10, losing +2 of its bonus per age period until its advantage is lost.

Age of Technique	Spell Resistance Penalty	Counter Charm Resistance Bonus/Technique Thaumatology Bonus	Depreciated Value
Less than 1 day	-5	+5	100%
1 day to 1 week	-4	+4	50%
1 week to 1 month	-3	+3	25%
1 to 3 months	-2	+2	10%
3 months to 6 months	-1	+1	5%
More then 6 months	0	0	0%

A brand new spell technique typically costs \$1,000 plus \$1,000 per prerequisite that spell has, and takes about one hour of practice under a teacher who knows the technique (one hours with just written instructions) to acquaint oneself with the new technique.

Counter charm costs vary depending on the scope of the charm. A general charm costs \$20,000 when new, while one college charms typically go for \$1,000 new. A single spell charm costs \$100 + \$100 per prerequisite the spell has, but sometimes last a bit longer before being superceded. For a new single-spell charm, roll one die every day -- the charm only begins to depreciate on a roll of the charm's age in days or less. Even without a charm, if you know the spell you get a single-spell charm bonus as if you had a charm depreciated to the same age as spell. Resistance bonuses for charms or spell knowledge are not cumulative, use only the best one.

Undiscovered Techniques

A sorcerer who develops a new technique may keep it secret, attempting to preserve its utility. The technique will not begin to depreciate until it becomes general knowledge.

There is a chance another mage will discover the same technique independently. Roll 3d every day the secret is kept --

on a 17 or 18 the technique is discovered independently and made public, thus beginning its depreciation.

Someone may discover the secret through espionage. The likelihood of this is entirely dependant on how careful the developer was with his notes and researches; this kind of incident makes prime adventure fodder. Factors improving security may include encryption or destruction of notes and physical and magical security of the lab. Factors reducing security could include the intelligence analysis skill of the agency attempting the theft, and the number of people who had access to the lab during the development of the technique.

Finally, the technique may be discovered through observation. Anytime the new technique is used, it will be discovered automatically if observed by another mage. Even if no mages seem to be present, someone may be scrying or lurking under cover (magical or not). Roll 3d6 every time the technique is used: on a 17 or 18 it is observed and begins to depreciate.

Developing New Techniques

To develop a new spellcasting technique, one requires a magical lab, current knowledge of the spell for which the technique is being developed, and the Thaumatology skill. Time required is 1d-5 days, +1 day for every prerequisite the spell has, with a minimum of 1 day. This assumes work continues for 8 hours a day.

Each day the researcher rolls against the spell, spending the appropriate amount of fatigue (or increasing his power tally if Umana is being used). A failed spell roll means that the research of that day is wasted; a critical success counts for 1d days research; a critical failure calls for a roll on the critical spell failure table, and counts for 1d-3 days research -- possibly setting the research back, but also possibly giving unusual incite.

After the research is complete, a roll on the thaumatology skill is made at -10. Modifiers for this roll are:

- *Spell has 3-5 prerequisites: -1*
- *Spell has 6-10 prerequisites: -2*
- *Spell has 11+ prerequisites: -3*
- *Age of most advanced technique for that spell known at time research is complete: +0-5, according to Table 1, and;*
- Add the number of character points in the spell (representing time spent studying that particular spell), up to +5.

Success by 5 or more indicates a valid new technique is developed. Success by less than 5, or failure, indicates a less advanced technique is invented, or an existing technique is duplicated -- the technique has a resistance penalty equal to the amount the roll was made by, and is considered to have already depreciated to that level. Critical success indicates that the technique is truly cutting edge, and qualifies for an extra bonus at the GM's discretion.

Creating Charms

Charms are small items, often jewelry, given a minor enchantment that aids in resisting spells. The easiest type of charm to create is the single-spell charm, which requires knowledge of the spell and a roll on the lower of the spell skill or symbol. It takes 10 minutes per prerequisite the spell has, with a minimum of 30 minutes. Material cost is \$25, but may be assumed to be trivial if a magical lab is available to work in. The newly created charm is effectively as old as the creator's spell technique in that spell.

One-college charms are created in a similar way, taking 2 hours to create and \$100 in materials, and requiring a roll against the lower of symbol drawing skill or skill in the appropriate college (calculated as per improvised magic rules). For one-college charms, the effective depreciated age is determined by the amount the roll succeeded by: 5 or more creating a +5 charm, just making the roll creating a charm that is not current enough to be of use (no bonus), as per table 1.

General charms are created alchemically, costing 1d x \$1,000 in materials, taking 1d hours to create, and requiring a

roll at alchemy -5, with appropriate modifiers for quality of the alchemical lab. Again, level of success is guided by table 1, with success by 5 or more creating a general charm with a +5 resistance bonus.

Options for Cutting Edge Magic

If cutting edge magic is only researched in one area of your world, it would be appropriate to charge an unusual background cost for the use of cutting edge magic. Any mage who does not pay the cost would be assumed to have learned traditional magic, and would not be flexible enough to continuously update their techniques. They also would be unable to create charms, though they certainly would benefit from carrying charms other people created.

If cutting edge magic is practiced in multiple areas, but those areas have no means of instant communications between them, a technique developed in one area would not begin to depreciate in the other area until enough time has passed that the technique could have spread. This time should probably be the same as the usual travel time between areas.

The time scale in Table 1 can be adjusted to make techniques less time dependant. This would be especially appropriate in a world where wizards are rare, spread out, and work independently. If techniques take longer to learn, or are harder to duplicate, it would also make them less time dependant.

Pyramid Pick

Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat

Published by [Firefly Games](#)

Written by Bruce Harlick & Patrick Sweeney

Illustrated by Bryce Nakagawa

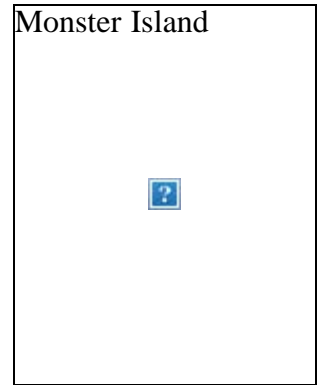
32 b&w pages; \$9.95

The title says it all, really: *Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat* is a game of combat between giant monsters played out on an island of monsters. In fact, it is deeply inspired by post-war Japanese monster movies that began with *Gojira, King of the Monsters* in 1954 (retitled *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* for its 1956 American release) and spawned many, many sequels. This is a game for fans of Japanese monster movies with their classic kaiju -- Japanese for "monster" -- such as Mothra, Ghidora, Gamera, Rodan, and so on. While it concentrates mostly upon the Japanese films, *Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat* also encompasses many of the western B-movie features of the 1950s and 1960s (essentially anything involving an irradiated beastie!), including *The Blob*, *Them!*, *King Kong* and *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*. Nor is television ignored, with discussions of both the Japanese *Ultraman* shows and, on a more modern note, the *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* series. The latter might be one way in which entice younger players to try *Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat* -- after all, it is designed for players aged eight and up.

Thankfully for the inhabitants of Earth, the United Nations Science Alert Corps has been established to deal with all of the kaiju that have plagued the planet since the middle of the twentieth century. In 1958 the UN voted to set up Monster Island where they could confine and study the monsters captured by the United Nations Science Alert Corps. Established on a former nuclear test site in the South Pacific, the island has been enclosed in a force bubble using a device salvaged from a repulsed alien invasion in 1968. This successfully imprisons all of the giant mutated beasts, living fossils, robots, and aliens that the Science Alert Corps has to deal with from around the globe. On the island itself, there can only be one "King of the Monsters," and this is what *Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat* is all about: creating and battling monsters to see who is top kaiju!

The kaiju creation process is very simple -- choose a concept, explain its origins, give it a name, assign points to attributes and powers from a pool of thirty points. Monsters have Strength, Reflexes, Health, and Mind. Since they are lumbering beasts, monsters have a maximum Reflexes score of six, and their Mind score is invariably low also, though this attribute is actually useful when players want to form alliances between their kaiju. Powers include Absorption of (or Immunity to) a single energy or chemical, Armor, Blast, Entangle, Extra Heads, Flying, Hand-to-Hand Attack, Leaping, Swimming, Teleporting and Tunnelling. This short list is enough to design quite a range of creatures. Strangely, should a player want an amphibious or water-breathing kaiju, he needs to buy Immunity to Drowning! A monster can be designed and be ready to play within five minutes, but if this is too much for the players, there are total of eighteen kaiju listed in *Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat*, including a decent description and their game statistics.

Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat requires some six-sided dice, a playing surface, and figures. The surface can be a plastic play mat with a grid of some kind or the floor or just the table. Terrain features can be drawn onto pieces of paper or found in toyshops or stores that stock war games miniatures or model railways. Neither hills nor mountains will be needed, as kaiju are too big to be bothered about such things as elevation! Those stores can also be the source for the monster figures needed for the game. The plastic or rubber type are best (with dinosaurs being a preferred favorite). The advantages of these are that they are easy to find, durable, cheap enough to replace if



you mess up intended modifications, and many gamers will (in all likelihood) own some already or know someone who does. In fact, *Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat* suggest that players select a figure that they like and design their creature around its appearance rather than creating one from scratch and then choosing a figure afterwards. Even if the players cannot lay their hands on any figures, there are fifteen cardboard monsters in the middle of the book, all done in full color and ready to use bar a little cutting and folding. These fifteen roughly match the eighteen examples listed in the book.

Firefly Games has licensed [Gold Rush Games' Action! System](#) for *Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat*, but those rules have been scaled to match the giant size of the combatants. Each turn, players move their kaiju across the island and then attack an opponent using either brute strength or whatever special abilities they possess. They can strike or grab an opponent, or even perform the "pile driver" maneuver on them. Monsters can be rammed, shoved, or even tripped, and a clever foe can have opponents end up in one of Monster Island's dangerous natural features: geysers, swamps, and pools of molten lava! Even before a fight breaks out, kaiju can improve their chances of attacking by showing off and psyching out their opponents. The flip side of this is that, once a monster has been defeated, the victor must spend a turn performing a rigorous Victory Celebration -- if the victor is part of an alliance, then their allies have to do this too!

Damage is dealt out in handfuls of six-sided dice, but reduced by an opponent's armor, toughness, and absorption ability. If the damage dealt is high enough a kaiju can be dazed or stunned. If it has the chance to rest, it can recover Life Points, but the real purpose of the game is to knock a foe to zero Life Points. The kaiju is then considered out of the game, but can regenerate to fight again in the next -- as they always do. If there is anything that lets *Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat* down, it is that this is the only scenario included in the book. Hopefully the first supplement, *Escape From Monster Island*, should expand the game beyond the battle to see who is King of Monster Island. Once the dust has settled, a game should have lasted no more than 45 minutes.

Physically, *Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat* is a nicely done book with a fair sprinkling of appropriate cartoon-style illustrations. The book shows the authors' love of the genre with every opportunity taken to insert a suitable quote from one monster movie or another. These are matched by the excellent filmography at the back of the book.

Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat could be used in conjunction with *GURPS Atomic Horror* or Hex Entertainment's new *M-Force RPG*, both as a setting book and as a source of ideas for monsters. Plus the mechanics could just as easily support games of giant robot combat or even wrestling if so desired . . . But above all, *Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat* is a fast and furious game of monster face-off and monster combat that really captures the feel of your favorite Godzilla movie to a tee. Although it is essentially a miniatures combat system, it is one that most will be willing to play because of the subject matter. After all, who among us does not like giant monster movies? And if that is not enough, it provides the perfect excuse to go buy plastic monsters!

--Matthew Pook



Agora

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

34 cards and rules sheet; \$4.00

There comes a time in every board-gamer's life where he or she says, "I'm tired of being told where I can lay my tiles." Hip Pocket Games (a tiny little division of Cheapass Games) has heard your plea and answered with the card game called *Agora*.

In *Agora*, two to four players take turns drawing and placing cards that represent stores in an ancient Greek marketplace. Designer James Ernest added an interesting twist when he decided that players could place their cards anywhere on the table at any angle. Thus, there is no imaginary grid and no need to line up cards. The only restraints are that no cards can overlap, you can not join shops owned by two different players, and if you play a card edge-to-edge with an existing card, only then must their grids line up.

Like most Cheapass games, *Agora* contains only the essential components . . . in this case, 34 cards and a rules sheet in a ziplock bag. The grayscale art is serviceable but not flashy. The cards are thick enough to stand up to repeated use. Players must supply about 20 counters in a different color for each player as well as a score pad.

Each card is divided into one or more shops. The art here is abstract, so the shops look more like a series of odd-shaped hallways than stores. Each shop is marked with one or more counter icons. Larger shops have a greater number of counter icons. Each shop also has one or more openings that lead off the card. These openings are important as they control how the shop may be enlarged as well as how many coins the shop scores. Finally, each card is marked with a letter (A, B, C, or D) and a special effect icon.

Before the game, each player chooses a letter and a set of counters. Play begins with one card in the center of the table. On each turn a player records his income, draws a card, plays the card, and then buys a shop.

At the beginning of a turn, a player counts the number of openings that lead from his shop out to the open table. If an opening is blocked by another card, or if an opening leads to an area that is closed off by other cards, it does not count. This concept takes some getting used to, but the rules contain a detailed illustration. Every opening earns the player one coin, and the first player to collect 50 coins wins.

Next, the active player draws a card. Note that players do not keep hands of cards. If the letter on the card matches the letter she chose at the beginning of the game, then the special effect takes place. There are three effects: A fire destroys the largest shop, a flood washes away the ownership counters of the largest shop, and the Festival allows every player to earn income immediately based on the current board.

After the special effect has taken place, the active player places the card as described earlier. Players have to decide if they want to extend the size of their existing shops, create new shops, or if they want to use the card to block the openings of other players' shops.

Finally, the active player buys a store by placing the required number of his counters on the shop. Some shops require more counters than others. Because players have an unlimited supply of counters, choosing a large shop is strictly a strategic choice.

Whenever a player places a card that increases the size of a shop, the owner automatically places the additional counters in the new section. Thus, a player can extend the size of an existing shop and buy a new one as well, all in the same turn. There are two reasons why she may not want to do this, however. First, large shops are more susceptible to fire and flood. Second, players must be aware of the current leader and take action to block some of his shop openings. Failure to thwart the leader on your turn may allow the other player to run away with the game.

Agora is a game about balancing the desire to advance your own position with the need to hurt other players' positions. This balance is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength because it gives depth to the choices in each turn. It also means that different groups will play the game differently depending on how they emphasize the two aspects. It is a weakness because a single ineffectual player can give the win to the player on his left. This is especially true of games with three players.

Like the rest of the Hip Pocket Games, *Agora* provides an interesting challenge for a small price. The games do not take long -- no more than 45 minutes to an hour unless you have a slow group -- so the initial learning curve is surmounted quickly. The replay value of *Agora* may be limited by the fact that there is only one way to win (earn coins) and one way to do it (build shops). But the price is so low that you will not exhaust the game before it proves its value.

--Brad Weier

In The Blink Of An Eye: The Mystery of Augustin Le Prince

"Urgent. Will Augustin Le Prince, last seen at Dijon boarding the train for Paris, please contact his family?"
-- newspaper advertisement placed in the winter of 1890-91

A Frenchman, holding American citizenship, working in England, invented the motion picture camera seven years before Edison. And then he vanished -- from a moving train, and from history itself. To find out where Augustin Le Prince went -- and who took him there -- we have to open our eyes very wide, watching history's still figures flicker past, and hope to catch a few suggestive glimpses. We have to look behind the shutters, and into the darkness off the screen, and even then we may not find the man who fell between the frames.

"In conclusion, I would say that Mr. Le Prince was in many ways a very extraordinary man, apart from his inventive genius, which was undoubtedly great. He stood 6 ft. 3 in. or 4 in. in his stockings, well built in proportion, and he was most gentle and considerate and, though an inventor, of an extremely placid disposition which nothing appeared to ruffle."
-- from the sworn statement of Frederick Mason

Born in Metz to a military family in 1841, Louis Aimé Augustin Le Prince became a draftsman and in the course of things married Lizzie Whitley, the daughter of a prominent Leeds metalworking magnate. His brother-in-law John Whitley was a flighty sort, continuously jumping into exhibitions and new inventions, into which he dragged Le Prince. Le Prince wound up in America, involved in promoting panoramas, enormous scenic views rotated around the audience. On the same circuit, Eadweard Muybridge's famous time-and-motion photographs of running horses attracted the attention of Le Prince's audiences -- and of Le Prince.

He became convinced that projecting images onto a screen at high speed would beat both panorama and zoopraxiscope, and turned his not inconsiderable talents (and his equally stout perfectionism) to the task of developing a motion picture camera-projector. In 1885, he developed a glass slide projector that beat the "persistence of vision" time of 16 frames per second -- when it worked. He used this design as the basis for a series of American (and later British and French) patents for his motion picture camera, which progressed to the point that he could take fixed-point, single-source moving pictures three years later. Unfortunately, he couldn't always project them. The gel paper stock he used as film reliably caught fire in the arc lamp, which made it almost the only piece of his balky machine that was reliable at all. Tinkering endlessly with 16-lens designs (to beat the fire problem), Le Prince began to run badly short of funds -- and, although he may not have known it, short of time as well.

"Le Prince's mode of life being upright in everything points to the idea that he was assassinated or put away. But you do not advance an idea of that kind, nor do you connect your father's disappearance with his invention."
-- letter of J.G. Sherman to Adolphe Le Prince, May 30, 1899

In the winter of 1889, Le Prince had the frustrating task of junking his work and starting over when the miracle substance celluloid came onto the market. Racing against other film pioneers such as Muybridge, Jules Marey, and William Freise-Greene, Le Prince perfected a single-lens camera using sprocketed celluloid film and a shutter-interrupter gear fundamentally identical to the cameras used today. By now desperate for funds, he demonstrated his new camera at the Paris Opera House in June of 1890, and received much encouragement but little cash. He finally braced his brother Albert in Dijon over a disputed family inheritance -- and wangled, at long last, the promise of a sizable payment. Relieved, he boarded the train at Dijon on September 16, 1890 for Paris -- and disappeared forever.

Such were Le Prince's workaholic habits that it wasn't until his failure to arrive in America a month later that anyone knew he was missing. His wife took up the search with the police of three countries, with a number of odd, anomalous results. In mid-November, Lizzie discovered an "L. LePrince" in the passenger register of the *SS Gascoigne* -- but nobody of that name seems to have passed through American immigration. A mysterious "Mr. Rose" began calling at odd times, claiming to have business with Le Prince but running away rather than meet Le Prince's son Adolphe, who

was slowly attempting to rebuild his father's patent case. An unknown suicide was reported from Le Prince's old Leeds lodgings -- again, police found no trace of Le Prince. And as a final, savage coda, Adolphe was discovered dead of a gunshot wound while hunting on Fire Island in the summer of 1901.

"Everyone steals in industry and commerce. I've stolen a lot myself. The thing is to know how to steal and stay out of being caught."

-- Thomas A. Edison

Although he never states it outright, Christopher Rawlence hints in *The Missing Reel* that Adolphe's presumed suicide -- and perhaps Augustin's disappearance -- are tied to Le Prince's most unscrupulous rival, Thomas Alva Edison, the Wizard of Menlo Park. Edison didn't have a particularly good idea about motion picture production, but he did have a very talented employee, William Dickson, a crack technical staff, deep pockets, and lawyers famous for dog-eat-dog capitalist savagery even by Gilded Age standards. Edison's kinematoscope began as a glorified peep-show, but the Wizard cleverly expanded his own patents while savaging those of his competitors -- including Le Prince. Thanks to an interesting quirk in patent law, since Le Prince could not be declared legally dead until seven years after his disappearance, his family could not act on his behalf to defend his motion picture patents in court. And lo and behold, two weeks shy of the seven-year anniversary of Le Prince's disappearance, Thomas Edison secured U.S. Patent #589,168 for a motion picture camera essentially indistinguishable from Le Prince's 1888 model. It was as simple as flicking a light switch -- Augustin Le Prince, and his camera, were consigned to the outer darkness.

"But the Manichees had put this toy to a very serious use. It was the basis of their heretical catechism. They thought that the gap between pictures symbolizes the abyss which is the dwelling place of evil. Whenever the gap flashes by, in just that fleeting split-second, it is like a crack opening up in the walls of the universe, revealing the great lightless void beyond God's creation."

-- Theodore Roszak, *Flicker*

Which darkness grows uncomfortably close as you examine the flickering lights on the screen. The camera lucida and camera obscura appear first in the works of magicians and alchemists, and stay there for an uncommonly long time. Roger Bacon, Giambattista della Porta, and Girolamo Cardano are only the highlights of a long reel of sorcerers to use these optical tricks of the trade. The Jesuit anomalist Athanasius Kircher invented the zoetrope in 1644, in a volume intriguingly titled *The Great Art of Light and Shadow* -- and then covered up all mention of his own invention for the rest of his career. The first projected magic lantern image we know of, by the astronomer (and alchemist) Christian Huygens in 1659, was of skeletons reeling in a dance of death, an interesting foreshadowing of [Pepper's Ghost](#) and the spectral phantasmagoria it unleashed. The French referred to the magic lantern as the "lantern of fear" or "the devil's lantern" -- its images unholy perversions of true reality. A popular exhibitor of such images, Georg Schropfer, went mad in 1774 and killed himself, haunted by the demons he could not stop seeing. The ghosts outside the frame claimed their first victim.

Edison might have known something of this, when he insulated himself from real kinescopic work; he built a black coffin-like studio in New Jersey known as "Black Maria." The image and the name are pregnant with heretical meaning, but taken -- quite innocently, no doubt -- from slang for a police wagon. Edison, meanwhile, worked on machines to speak with the dead, and read his Theosophical books, and kept silent. Not everyone had Edison's power. In 1902, Fernand Le Prince appeared on the dunes where his brother Alphonse had died a year earlier, raving, "Hurry along! There are evil spirits abroad!" What had he seen on his brother's death spot -- what had the brothers both seen on their father's screen, raw in its first primitive being? Did the filmed image somehow partake of these powers and secrets? Or did it open them up to our eyes, catching things we can only see between blinks in still images and feeding them into our own perceptual realm, stopped down to 16 frames per second?

"It is in the line of Dioramas and Panoramas but with figures in lifelike action; this wants keeping secret till secured. I am now making apparatus to work it practically, and if as successful as I anticipate, it will bring me back to England . . . Remember me to our Brothers at Fidelity [Lodge], and hoping to read you soon, I shake hands most heartily . . ."
-- letter of Augustin Le Prince to fellow-Mason Richard Wilson, Nov 2, 1886

And if so, then perhaps Augustin Le Prince knew it. He was a practicing Freemason, as was his brother-in-law Joseph

and his financial backer Richard Wilson. He was associated with the Masonic exhibition of Cleopatra's Needle in 1878, researching "authentic Egyptian" designs for brass commemoratives -- and perhaps uncovering the elements of ancient knowledge that Kircher and Bacon had only hinted at. Inspired by these hints, perhaps Le Prince shone the light of his arc lamp into the wrong corner. Le Prince's own first films were shot in the streets of Leeds in the fall of 1888, as [Jack the Ripper](#) unleashed his own century of cinematic horror (with his own peculiarly Masonic connections) in London. The "Yorkshire Ripper" (inspired by a mysterious ghostly voice in a cemetery) left six victims neatly spread across Le Prince's old neighborhood in Leeds a century after Cleopatra's Needle went up.

Even his name -- Le Prince -- intrigues, given that Robert Boyle (the alchemist who also built a magic lantern) headed the Prieuré of Sion in Kircher's day, and that Le Prince's father had "stood in" for Napoleon III in a peculiar ceremony for which he was awarded the Legion of Honor. Is there some connection between that medal and Le Prince's "Maltese Cross" -- Templar cross? Rosy cross? -- interrupter gear? Was the mysterious "Mr. Rose" a fin-de-siècle Man In Black, sent by the Rosicrucian community in Paris to find Le Prince and offer him a place in the (literally) Invisible College of Robert Boyle and Peter Roget, the discoverer of "persistence of vision"? Or was Le Prince taken prisoner by one of the rogue Satanist orders in Paris who sought his knowledge to free the ghosts and the rippers, and the even fouler things that lurk just outside our own persistent gaze? Or did he finally find the way into shadow he had sought, stepping out of the frame that threatened to freeze him forever in time? Hold. Cut. Fade to black.

Invitation to a Necktie Party

A generic Western horror scenario, including *Deadlands* stats

by Dylan Craig

Overview

This adventure is set in the American Wild West, in the closing years (1876-1899) of the 19th Century. The characters are headed overland through sparsely-populated frontier region when they discover a town whose citizens have all met an untimely death at the end of a hangman's rope. To their horror, the pattern is repeated in the next town they pass through. Can they get ahead of the mysterious hangman and prevent a third community from being wiped out?

Setup

This adventure works best in a region composed mainly of small, fairly insular communities where news travels slowly and central law enforcement or governmental support is thin on the ground. The progression of the adventure requires three small settlements which lie in a rough line along which the characters must travel if they are to reach their intended destination. This destination may lie outside the boundaries of this adventure, or it may be set in the final town to add a sense of urgency to the heroes' mission: If they cannot prevent the town from the hellish fate which has befallen its neighbors, it will mean that they will be unable to proceed with the mission or assignment they were traveling to the town to receive. If the scope of the campaign allows it, the characters may even be the ones who sent Kurt Pembroke (see below) to the gallows; this "prequel" could be played as a previous adventure occurring some six months or so previously. If you do not choose to make use of this connection between the Necktie Man and the party, then the Sheriff of St. Jude (see below), is the man responsible for his apprehension.

The Story So Far

Kurt "Necktie" Pembroke and his gang were a notorious band of bushwhackers and regulators operating on the cattle-rich Texan plains, whose reputation for brutality and shady dealings was well known among the terrified locals. Many innocent men and women who got on the wrong side of the Necktie Posse ended up dangling from a tree-branch; but as long as Pembroke and his men did their job in protecting the Cattle Barons' herds and stringing up as many rustlers as they could find, the corrupt local law let them be. One day, the gang's reign of terror was ended by the intervention of a group of steel-nerved gunmen from outside the district, and Pembroke was hauled before a Circuit Judge and sentenced, like his scores of victims, to be "jerked to Jesus." The sentence was duly carried out, and Pembroke was tossed into an unmarked grave still wearing the noose which had choked the life from his evil body. But "Necktie" Pembroke did not lie still for long. A fragment of the hanging rope which had been sold to a passing souvenir hunter retained a fragment of Pembroke's dark soul -- a fragment which slowly grew in power until his consciousness returned from whichever dark pit it had so briefly inhabited. Kurt Pembroke was now the Necktie Man -- a formless being with the ability to possess and animate the very fibers of any rope strong enough to be used as a hanging rope. Furthermore, the Necktie Man soon found that he was able to bind the corpse of a single victim into a ghastly half-living existence; this unfortunate person had to have died by hanging, and would return from the dead conscious but completely under the control of the Necktie Man. This undead servitor's usual function has thus far been to transport the coil of rope within which Pembroke's spirit is lurking from place to place. The powers, weaknesses and motivations of the Necktie Man are more fully described below.

Canyon Pass

Canyon Pass was a small town of 58 souls straddling a torturously windy track through the mountains. The town's main industries revolved around this placement; several workshops catered for the repair and refitting of freight wagons bound for the pass, and the town's few taverns rented both small and large rooms to cater for stagecoach passengers.

That something is the matter with the town is apparent long before the heroes arrive. From miles away, the steady circling of buzzards can be seen; as the town draws nearer, the yipping of coyotes fighting among themselves begins to echo through the mountains. Indeed, the town is overrun with scavenger creatures of this type; most of the activity is centered around Hooper's barn, a large building on the Northwest side of town. It is unlikely that the scavengers will pose much danger to the characters, especially if they herald their arrival with a few well-placed rifle shots, but if the party is unusually cocky or careless, or try and get between a feasting coyote and its meal, a fight will definitely ensue. Stats for the coyotes can be found in the Boot Hill section.

Hooper's barn is a three-story building used for the general storage needs of the townsfolk; everything from bales of hay to excess produce and shipping goods from the freight wagons used to be stored here. Currently, however, the barn holds only death. The roof is a spider's web of ropes, strung from every crosspiece and beam; from each rope, a body dangles, hanging by the neck. While the bodies have been fairly safe from the coyotes, dangling as they are between ten and fifteen feet off the ground, the buzzards have been busy and, in several cases, have bitten through the ropes, sending the bodies crashing to the ground for the waiting coyotes.

The rest of the town is utterly deserted, but careful investigation reveals several facts:

- The small safe of the combined savings bank and post office has been forced open with a crowbar and sledgehammer, both of which lie nearby. The contents of the safe are gone. In a town of this size, it is unlikely that their total worth exceeded a hundred dollars, as most of the larger accounts were stored in a city branch of the bank.
- There is evidence that the townsfolk were involved in some kind of fight before they died. Many buildings show signs of improvised barricades which have been torn open, and spent shells litter the floors and streets. Many of the townsfolk bear bruises and abrasions, but none seem to have died from any recognizable weapons (there are no bullet holes, arrow wounds, cuts, or the like). A successful examination of a few of the corpses by a character with medical or forensic skills shows that most of the townsfolk appear to have been assaulted using blunt instruments like clubs and blackjacks, then tied up roughly and dragged to the barn, and finally hung while still alive. Characters possessing appropriate outdoor or survival-focused skill will also be able to determine that four days have passed since this assault took place.
- There is only one body outside the barn, and it is one which has suffered greatly from the attentions of the coyotes. It lies on the other side of the town to the barn, and is only likely to be found if the heroes search the town fairly carefully. It appears to be the body of an adult male; while a routine medical examination will confirm that the neck, like the necks of the other victims, has been broken by a sudden jerk, it will take a thorough autopsy to ascertain that, unlike the other townsfolk, this body bears multiple bullet impacts -- from a variety of calibers of pistol and rifle -- and that these wounds were inflicted after death.

It will take several hours to cut the bodies down, during which time the heroes will be faced with a puzzling question: How did they get up there in the first place? There are no stepladders of sufficient height for the victims to have been hung in the traditional manner (elevated and then dropped). Similarly, there are no platforms or landings from which they could have been thrown. Finally, the victims could not have been hoisted from ground level, because the ropes are securely tied around the beams above, not just passed over and secured to a peg. If the party investigate the town's single church, which stands a little away from the main cluster of buildings, they will find it undamaged. The entrances are not barricaded; apparently it was completely untouched by the fighting. The church has no living area; the priest lives in town.

The town's livestock are in bad shape. Several animals have died from hunger while tied to posts or hitching rails, and become food for the coyotes. Merciful parties should not leave the town without setting these poor creatures free. If the party is on foot for any reason, they will be able to find mounts in the town stables. These animals are weak from lack of water, but if watered and rested, should be ready to move out at a slow pace at the end of the day. There are no other clues to be found in Canyon Pass. The nearest large settlement is St. Jude, which is just under 90 miles west of

Canyon Pass, through the mountains and the badlands which lie beyond. Characters with specific knowledge of this area or a recent and detailed map (one can be found in the postmaster's office) will know that there is a way station approximately halfway between Canyon Pass and St. Jude, on the other side of the mountain peaks. There is no telegraph link between Canyon Pass and St. Jude or the way station. The trip to the way station will take one or two days by horse, or three to four days by foot, depending on endurance and load. The mountains are fairly quiet, and the heroes are unlikely to encounter any danger.

Liberty Station

Liberty Station exists to service the same traffic as Canyon Pass; however, the rocky and inhospitable soil of the badlands has prevented it from growing into a settlement like Canyon Pass or St. Jude. The station consists of four buildings: a barn-like shed, a watering hole and taphouse, a two-story building housing the station owner's office and living quarters, and a ramshackle boarding dormitory and mess hall for the drovers and passersby. The twisting track the heroes have been following passes through the station into and disappears into a stand of twisted bushes and small trees. Those familiar with the area will know that this road terminates at a 30-foot gully after a few hundred paces, where a sturdy bridge stands to convey traffic over the drop.

The site is quiet as the party approach; hailing the buildings elicits no response except for a flurry of startled pigeons from the roof of the barn. A quick examination shows that the station is, indeed, empty; however, it bears the same signs of struggle as Canyon Pass. Doors stand open, wrenched from their hinges; windows gape brokenly, and the saloon is a nightmare of overturned chairs and smashed and dripping beer kegs. The carnage is relatively fresh; it appears that whatever happened here, it happened within the last 24 hours. One striking feature of the eerie scene revolves around the tiny, gap-roofed chapel built along one side of the dormitory; yards and yards of rope have been painstakingly wound around the building, and lie in loops and piles outside the windows and doors. The rope gives off an evil smell; heroes with the appropriate skills will recognize the smell as a mixture of carbolic soap, sweat, wood, and stale human excrement -- the smell of a regularly-used gallows. Characters examining the rope will see that rather than being composed of one long consistent piece, the rope is made of a series of smaller, distinct ropes whose fibers have been intricately woven into one another at the tips to join the ropes together.

Whatever happened in the chapel, it wasn't pretty; the room is as badly damaged as the saloon, although most of the damage looks less like the signs of a struggle than it does like vandalism. Careful examination reveals a long, sharp branch lying in the rubble amidst the stools and pews; this branch, which still bears leaves, is caked with gore halfway along its length. Its origin can be traced to the tree nearest to the town in the direction of the bridge; examining the tree shows that the four-inch thick branch was snapped off cleanly from the trunk and then, based on the splinters of glass embedded in its bark, thrown through the chapel's window with great force.

The fate of the way station's inhabitants becomes clear when the heroes reach the bridge. These unfortunates have been strung up from the underside of the span in much the same way as the citizens of Canyon Pass were. The bodies are those of four sturdily-built men who have the look of drovers or laborers about them, two women in housedresses, a child of around four years of age, a wild-haired man in a priest's clothing, and another man who wears bartender's gear. The priest bears a wound which matches those which might have been inflicted by the branch-spear; this gaping wound which passes right through his torso. If the characters are able to haul his body up for closer inspection, they will see that he was also severely whipped between being wounded and dying; the whipping appears to have been done with a knotted rope. The child is wearing a nightshirt, indicating that the attack took place at night.

Strangely enough, as in Canyon Pass, one body is lying apart from the others; this is a middle-aged man, dressed like a clerk but with ragged shoes worn down to their last few layers of sole and covered in dust. The dust will be familiar to the party; it is the same color as the powdery limestone through which the mountain pass they have just followed runs. Like the others, the cause of his death was definitely a broken neck; however, not only does he bear similar wounds to his counterpart in Canyon Pass (two pistol holes in his abdomen), but the scrapes and abrasions on his battered feet also appear to have been sustained after his death. Furthermore, based on the decomposition of the body, he has been dead far longer than the other bodies -- five or six days. Unlikely as it sounds, it appears that this dead body walked to this spot, broken neck and pistol wounds notwithstanding, before dropping. Anyone searching the body will discover a

canvas moneybag of the type used by banks stuffed into a pocket; it contains \$86.50 in small bills and change.

As the characters examine the bodies, however, they will be startled to hear the report of a shotgun, and the whizzing of buckshot past their heads! Anyone who was observing the area around the bridge rather than just the bodies will have seen a man carrying a brace of rabbits and dressed for hunting round a corner on the far side of the bridge, drop the rabbits in shock, and then charge at the party with a terrible mix of anguish and murderous rage on his face. This is Horace Greeley, brother to Wallace Greeley (the owner of the station and the man in bartender's gear), and husband to Claudia Greeley, the younger of the two women.

Horace is 50 yards from the heroes when he sees the terrible fate that has befallen his family during his absence; leaping to the conclusion that the party were somehow behind the killings, he makes for them at a sprint, howling like a gut-shot dog and with tears streaming down his face. He will discharge his shotgun first, one barrel at a time, then draw and empty his six-shooter, and finally pull a hatchet and knife from his belt to engage anyone he finds still standing. Of course, it would be fairly easy for the heroes to meet his charge with a single, fatal bullet; however, it should be clear to them that, from his appearance and anguish, he is as much a victim of the mysterious hangman as the cold bodies beneath the bridge. Horace will listen to sense, once restrained and disarmed; at this point, or as soon as he sustains a wound serious enough to disarm or incapacitate him, he will collapse into fitful sobs. With a little prying, Horace will furnish the heroes with the following information:

- He has been out in the mountains for two days, on a hunting trip.
- He may have heard some gunshots last night, but he assumed that they originated from a hunter or trapper's rifle. He certainly didn't think they were of sufficient volume to imply that the station was under attack.
- The victims account for all but two of the staff -- himself, and Peter Wallace, the head drover.
- He has never seen the "extra" victim before.

Peter Wallace was the only one of the drovers to habitually carry a pistol. As far as he knows, all the other firearms at the station, apart from his own Colt, were rifles and shotguns.

Horace's information can be corroborated by examining the stations' record books. No guests or new employees have been registered in the last two days, and no freight traffic is expected for at least another week. Also available for investigating heroes is a recent tintype portrait of the way station staff; Peter Wallace is visible in the front row.

If questioned about the station's church, Horace will tell the heroes that it was operated by Pastor Nimrod Goodson, an eccentric faith-healer and revivalist preacher from out East. Heroes familiar with the faith-healing circuit will know of Pastor Goodson; he was expelled from his parish after claims of misconduct were brought against him by the parents of one of his young 'assistants.' Before his fall from grace, however, he was credited with having performed several public miracles; even after his expulsion, his flock's view of him as a man of powerful faith remained largely intact. Horace never spoke with him at length; most conversations seemed to founder on the Pastor's view that evil was a physical presence in the world, which had to be combated physically as well as spiritually; according to Horace, this was nothing more than "boogie-man talk ta make folks jumpy and get 'em reachin' for their loose change," and he wanted nothing of it. Now, he mumbles, he's not so sure anymore.

Once he has recovered from the initial shock of his discovery and told the heroes what they wanted to know, Horace lapses into gloomy silence. He wants nothing more than to be left alone and bury his family in peace; he will not accompany the party. If the heroes have come to the obvious conclusion that some malevolent agency is moving Westwards, eliminating human life as it finds it, and that St. Jude is probably next on the list, they will probably be wanting to get moving as soon as possible. Adding urgency to their plans is the fact that St. Jude lies on a railroad spur; assuming that those responsible for the hangings are moving on foot (as the more recent murders at the station imply), the heroes' last chance for getting ahead of them is to make it to St. Jude first.

The track between the station and St. Jude is of a similar length to the track through the mountains, but the flatter ground will allow the party to make much better time than they did through the pass. The trip can be made in half a day's hard riding, or a day's hard march. Ideally, this will have the heroes arriving at St. Jude just after nightfall. If they seem to be about to arrive in broad daylight, a delaying encounter is in order; anything from the very mundane (a collapsed ford which makes a detour around a rushing stream necessary) to the more dangerous (an encounter with

bandits, an Indian raiding party, or poisonous snake) can be used to accomplish this.

St. Jude

The heroes' hearts will probably be in their throats as they crest the last low rise before St. Jude; a strong wind at their backs is carrying any sounds that might be coming from the town away from them, and it is only when they come in sight of the town that they will be able to see that all, apparently, is still well. The townsfolk are returning home from their work in the fields and stores, and every street shows signs of life. St. Jude is larger than Canyon Pass, with just over four hundred inhabitants. The largest building in town is the switching shed at the train station; this building is used to shelter trains while they are pulled off the single track for loading and unloading, and is large enough to hold two sets of four carriages alongside one another. The switching shed is open on three sides, with a wooden wall between the station and the town and a corrugated iron roof standing some sixty feet high. Several block and tackle pulleys are mounted on the corners of the building, for unloading heavy cargoes; power is provided by ox teams when this is necessary. Several hundred yards of rope lie neatly coiled under tarpaulins near the pulley bases, as well as iron chains and heavy rope nets.

The town itself is arranged fairly haphazardly; the arrival of the railroad forced more growth onto St. Jude than the town's modest founders ever anticipated, and the original regular street plan has been overwhelmed by a profusion of hastily built and badly situated boarding houses, saloons, and stores. Sanitation is likewise a problem; to avoid contamination of the local wells (the local water table is very high), the town's waste is carried outside the city limits by open sewer. Drainage in these sewers is not ideal, and the ghastly effluent they carry often appears to be completely stagnant when viewed through the rusty grill covers that close the drains off from the tread of unwary feet. The town's more "uppity" inhabitants are never seen without a scented handkerchief pressed to their noses, but most regular folk have come to accept the stink as a part of life in St. Jude.

The town has two churches and a synagogue; the churches (St. Timothy's Lutheran Congregation and the Church of St. Jude) are across the street from one another, whereas the synagogue is on the other side of town, on Olive Street. St. Timothy's is a small stone church, with room for no more than 20 worshippers; St. Jude's, while larger and more more regularly attended, was in fact never properly consecrated. The priest responsible for the consecration was a secret opium addict, who had long since lost all faith in the existence of a divine being; as a result, the consecration ceremony had no "spiritual" effect on the building and its environs, which cannot be considered to be "holy ground." This will become significant should the characters attempt to take shelter in the church or use holy water from its font; such attempts are bound to fail. The Olive Street synagogue is a large, sturdy building in the commercial area of the town, and has enough space for 75 seated or 150 standing congregants.

The town has both a Sheriff and a Town Marshall; these two functionaries share a single office and joint responsibility for the town's safety. If the party approach them with tales of supernatural killers, demonic ropes, or anything of that nature, they will be promptly escorted out of town as soft-brained madmen and troublemakers unless they can prove their story. Should they return to the town after being "asked to leave," they will spend a night in the cells for their trouble. If the players omit any "unusual" details from their story and simply claim that persons unknown have attacked two local settlements and executed everyone in them, assistance will be far more forthcoming. A town meeting is called, and the townsfolk are divided into four groups and placed in the town hall, the schoolhouse, and the two largest saloons (the most secure and defensible buildings in town).

If the townsfolk are alerted in this way, Peter Wallace is nowhere to be found; the Necktie Man orders him to lie low and avoid detection until he is needed. The attack will still come, but the town will be more ready for it. If, on the other hand, the heroes attempt to find and neutralize Wallace before raising the alarm, they will find him staring glassily into an untouched tumbler of whisky in one of the town's grimmer drinking holes. According to the bar staff, he has been there almost an hour, and they are on the point of asking him to drink up or get out.

Wallace is experiencing a few minutes' respite and awareness while the Necktie Man is preoccupied elsewhere (having already infested the rope piles in the switching shed). He is wearing a thick scarf, beneath which a livid rope-burn can be glimpsed. The scarf is also being used to hold his head upright; if it is removed, his head will loll on his chest due

to his broken neck. His demeanor is dazed and distant; the heroes will have to work subtly to find out what he knows. If he is confronted aggressively, or attacked, the Necktie Man will be alerted and will take full control of him again, simultaneously launching his own attack against the town. If the heroes get a chance to talk to Wallace, his version of events is as follows:

Two nights ago, a strangely-dressed and ragged man stumbled into the way station's saloon. Although he was dressed like a townsman, he was covered in trail dust and badly burned by the sun (this matches the description of the corpse found next to the way station bridge). Wallace could see that he had some kind of cut or burn on his neck. Thinking he might be hurt, some of the men moved towards him, but he suddenly began to scream and thrash, breaking free from them and running for the door. As he got halfway there, he suddenly skidded to a halt, and started mumbling something. Wallace wasn't close enough to hear exactly, but it sounded as if the man was begging them to "put him down." That was when all hell broke loose.

At this point, Wallace's voice suddenly breaks, and he goes silent. Looking wildly up at the characters, he whispers, "He's coming . . . he's heard me talking and now he's coming. Please: don't let him get me. Kill me. Like we should have killed that poor son-of-a-bitch. A bullet won't do it. You have to kill me proper . . . cut my head off. Please! Do it now!"

The characters have a few rounds to make what they will of this strange request (bearing the reactions of the other inhabitants of the crowded saloon in mind), and then, with a smashing of glass, the Necktie Man begins his lynching party.

The Attack

The Necktie Man's main asset in this combat is the hundreds upon hundreds of yards of rope in the switching shed. Because the spirit needs an unbroken contact to any piece of rope it wishes to animate, these rope resources have been organized in a massive spider's web, with tendrils extending throughout the town and leading back to a central mass in the rafters of the shed. Any piece of rope which can be severed from this main mass is beyond the Necktie Man's control. Unfortunately, the rope has been placed in some fairly inventive locations, such as the sewer drains, to prevent "branches" from being severed from the "trunks." Loops and loops of rope lie under the surface of the sewer sludge, only bursting forth when the Necktie Man senses movement nearby. Victims are entangled by these rope tendrils and dragged back to the switching shed to be hung; the speed at which they are dragged is equivalent to a fast sprint for a human, so that characters attempting to rescue a captive should still find it possible to catch up with the retreating tendril and attempt to cut the victim loose or sever the rope.

Depending on where the heroes are when the Necktie Man attacks, this fight could go one of several ways. The initial confrontation will most likely involve beating back an assault on the area in which the heroes find themselves. If the townsfolk are concentrated in the four locations mentioned above, each location will be attacked by a 250-yard rope mass (see the Necktie Man's stats, below, for clarification); if the townsfolk are spread out, 10 rope masses of 100 yards each will be utilized instead. This attack will take the form of a massive wave of noose-bearing rope lengths smashing through windows and unlatched doors, slithering down chimneys, and appearing out of ventilation grilles to club, throttle, and ensnare all within. As noted below, each 10-yard length of rope gains a single "attack" in each round; however, the Necktie Man's perceptive skills are low while he inhabits the ropes, and he is thus not able to concentrate attacks on particularly dangerous opponents; if there are more targets than ropes, the ropes attack randomly. Rather than calculate each attack individually, it is recommended that only attacks directed against the heroes are actually rolled. To determine how many townsfolk are snagged in a round, roll 1d10 for each 100-yard rope mass and 3d10 for each 250-yard rope mass. Each attack directed at a PC rather than a townsman during that round subtracts 2 from this roll. Thus, if a 100-yard rope mass is attacking a building containing 5 PCs and 13 citizens, and the random distribution of attacks indicates that three of the PCs are attacked, then the rope's 7 other attacks will spell doom for (1d10-6) citizens in that round. Note that, while the rope may seek targets randomly, it is smart enough to respond to attacks made against it: any PC wishing to stand in a tendril's path rather than let it attack a citizen may do

so, and any PC attacking a tendril is sure to face retaliation.

The Necktie Man prefers to hang his victims at a central location, and will do this whenever possible; however, if circumstances make it impossible to drag a victim back to the switching shed, their neck will be broken where they lie and their body left for re-hanging at a later stage. Of course, the rope tendril can use tools, especially as far as clubbing difficult targets with benches or impaling them with curtain-rails go. These methods are left till last, however, because they require extra concentration from the Necktie Man which he, held in the grip of a killing frenzy, is loath to do. In addition, victims which are not "properly" hung cannot be raised as servitors. The townsfolk are able to defend themselves from the rope too, of course; however, their effectiveness increases markedly if they are concentrated in the four tough buildings mentioned above rather than scattered around the town. In addition, the proportion of melee weapons rather than firearms is a significant factor in their defensive capabilities; while cutting the rope is merely challenging, blasting it in midair is almost impossible. If the citizens are split up when the Necktie Man attacks, each 100-yard mass will suffer the loss of 1d20 yards of its rope each round of fighting. If the citizens are concentrated into four groups, each 250-yard mass will lose 1d100 yards of rope each round. If the citizens are inappropriately armed (i.e., with firearms only), these numbers should be halved.

Note that these figures are only intended as a guide for resolving how badly the battle fares for the town, and does not necessarily use "rounds" in the same way as the combat scenes involving the PCs use "rounds." It will probably take far longer to resolve the initial assault, either way, than the system suggests; certainly, once the effects of the heroes diving after ensnared citizens to cut them loose, or trying to find and sever the nearest "branch" to deliver a building from attack, are factored in, it should take closer to twenty or thirty minutes. The rope's sensitivity to divine power should also be factored into the proceedings; because the rope is unable to touch or enter holy ground, those hiding inside St. Jude's or the Olive Street synagogue are safe from direct attack. The rope may still use hurled weapons to attack, however, or call on its undead servitor to use fire against the building. Every round in which the rope attacks a holy site, it loses 2d10% of its length simply due to its proximity to the holy aura; hurled items have a 2 in 10 chance of causing the death of one person inside the holy site, and a 1 in 10 chance of causing two deaths.

The second phase of the confrontation will involve the heroes (and, possibly, the surviving citizens) leaving their defensive positions, either to assist others who are still under attack, or to mount a counter-offensive. With most of the lights in the town snuffed by rope tendrils, this is likely to be a frantic series of encounters with nooses which strike from ambush and drag their victims into alleyways and attics (or, worst of all, into the sewers). The Necktie Man's current undead servitor (Peter Wallace, if the party have not already put him out of his misery, or whichever poor unfortunate it has raised since) will also be in evidence, performing tasks that the rope tendrils cannot (like torching buildings, using firearms, or misleading rescuers). If the defense of the town has led to the destruction of all the rope masses used in the first attack, another ten 25-yard masses will be deployed from the main mass for this task; otherwise, any rope masses which have not been wiped out by the townsfolk will be deployed in 25- or 50-yard masses. The final phase of the confrontation will involve tackling the main body of the rope (which will either be a 500-yard or 250-yard mass, depending on how much of the overall mass was destroyed in the first two phases) in the switching shed. Once the town is cleared, this task can probably be attempted more on the humans' terms for a change; however, several dozen victims have been cocooned rather than killed outright, so any initiatives to burn down the switching shed or otherwise destroy it must be accompanied by a lightning assault to free these hostages. It will take approximately twenty minutes to get the townsfolk into any kind of shape for an assault; when this is mounted, the sides will annihilate one another at the steady rate of 1d10 townsfolk for every 2d10 yards of rope, per time period. Great care must be exercised when the Necktie Man is down to his last few yards of rope; because his consciousness stays in the largest piece of rope when a length is cut, cutting the rope down to tiny pieces is dangerous, because it raises the possibility of the piece containing Kurt Pembroke's evil essence simply slithering away unnoticed. It is far safer to use an area effect weapon at this stage -- fire, acid, or exorcism -- to be sure of finishing the job.

Conclusion

For an event of such supernatural magnitude, there is remarkably little to clear up afterwards, except the very mundane wreckage of the town itself and lots of useless, one-yard lengths of rope. It may be that the party has managed to identify the Necktie Man as Kurt Pembroke; in this case, a journey to his resting place outside Fort Helena in

Montana might be in order, to ensure that his unnatural return from the dead has been fully thwarted. Nothing can be done for the innocents who have already ended their days at the end of the Necktie Man's possessed nooses; for the survivors, there is bitter comfort in knowing that they have faced, and defeated, a creature of such malignancy and power that little would have stood in its path had they been overcome.

Boot Hill

(Deadlands stats for this adventure)

Kurt Pembroke, the Necktie Man

Background: No-one is ever likely to know what kind of dark power allowed Kurt Pembroke to claw his way back into the lands of the living; certainly, the experience has done little to reform him. His rope body affords him increased levels of perception the closer a tendril gets to something; at ten yards, a vague movement and vibration sense is all he can muster, while at closer ranges, such as when a rope tentacle is in contact with something, his senses are sharp enough to discern writing on a piece of paper. Kurt's motivations are to cause as much terror as possible - as the Necktie Man, Kurt enjoys terrifying his victims rather than killing them outright - and to exact revenge on the person(s) responsible for his capture and execution. He can communicate, if he so chooses, by grasping an object and using it as a stylus, or through the borrowed vocal chords of a servitor.

The servitor is also used to transport the rope bearing Pembroke's essence from place to place; sunlight causes the rope mass to go dormant, and unshielded exposure to sunlight causes weakening followed by final death in 1d6+1 hours.

Corporeal Traits: D: 3d8, N: 1d10, S: 1d10, Q: 3d10, V: 2d12

Fightin': Brawlin': 1d10, Sneak (tentacle) 4d10

Mental Traits: C: 2d10, K: 2d6, M: 1d12, Sm: 1d6, Sp: 2d8

Terror: 5 / 7 (+2 to Terror when attacking unexpectedly)

Wind: 25 - regenerates 1 per hour.

Size: Special. No effects for melee weapons, but missile weapons (apart from shotguns) are at -6 to hit. Shotguns do not take this penalty, but damage is halved to represent the decreased number of pellets that will hit the rope.

Entanglement (requires a raise on the roll to hit): Tentacles can inflict 1d10 crushing damage per round when constricting; any Armor the foe is wearing is halved in value to determine how much protection is given. This damage is inflicted every round, during which the victim may only free themselves by succeeding in an opposed Strength test. If several characters are trying to free the victim, the Strength roll of the strongest character is used, with a +2 bonus per helper. A character may elect to try and get a limb free rather than their whole body; this requires a Nimbleness roll against a difficulty of 7. If they have an arm free, they may attempt to attack the ropes holding them with any weapon they have to hand.

Servitor: Costs 5 Wind per attempt and requires a Spirit Roll of 3. Servitor has the same stats as regular Walkin' Dead; the Necktie Man has full dominion, but the original spirit regains control when the Necktie Man is busy or distracted. Servitor must have died by hanging to be raised using this effect.

Speed: Each rope mass draws one card for every 10 yards of length; hence, a 50-yard mass draws five cards.

Hangin': Use the standard rules for hanging to determine damage. Hanging a resisting human takes 2 rounds. A suitable crossbar or support is required.

Special Damage rules: Instead of lowering Wind or Quick Hits, damage done to the rope tentacles is translated directly into yards of rope which have been severed from the main body. Damage rolled against the rope is first reduced by five, to represent the intrinsic toughness of the strands; any points remaining cause the loss of roughly one yard of rope per point. Hence, an attack doing twelve points of damage would sever seven yards of rope tendrils from the rope mass.

Note that exorcism may be used to damage the rope mass. The rope cannot attack the exorcist (who must have the Faith attribute) directly, but may still throw things from a distance. Each round that the exorcist can beat the rope mass in a contested Spirit roll, the rope mass loses 1d20 yards of rope.

Canyon Pass Coyotes frenzied scavengers

Corporeal Traits: D: 1d4, N: 3d8, S: 2d4, Q: 2d10, V: 1d6

Fightin': Bitin': 3d8 (bite does 2d4 damage), Sneak: 5d8

Mental Traits: C: 2d10, K: 1d4, M: 1d6, Sm: 1d8, SP: 1d6

Trackin': 3d10

Quick Hits: 15

Horace Greeley bereaved husband

Corporeal Traits: D: 2d6, N: 3d6, S: 3d6, Q: 2d6, V: 1d6

Fightin': Hatchet & Knife: 3d6, Shootin': Pistol & Shotgun: 3d6, Dodge 2d6

Mental Traits: C: 4d6, K: 1d6, M: 1d6, Sm: 1d6, SP: 1d6

Overawe: 3d6, Medicine: General: 1d6, Survival: Mountains: 3d6

Edges/Hindrances: Loco 3 (Short Fuse), Don't Get 'im Riled

Gear: 12-gauge double barreled shotgun, .36 Colt Navy, hatchet, hunting knife

Quick Hits: 30

Pyramid Review

Prawn LARP

Published by [Interactivities Ink, Limited](#)

Written by Mike Young

Art by Sean Butler and Art Today

48 b&w pages; \$13.50

While LARPs offer the participants the chance to take roleplaying to the next level, wearing the same costumes as their alter egos, carrying props, and performing some of the less outrageous physical activities, the setting itself is often hard to duplicate. There's seldom a gothic mansion or cobble-stoned old street in Europe around when you need it to set the mood. As long as you have access to a swimming pool, that's not going to be the case when you play the *Prawn* LARP from Interactivities Ink, Ltd.

Most of the players in *Prawn* portray fish or other creatures that make their home in the water (for whatever reason, prawn *per se* don't seem to play a big part). The setting is The Tank, the only world most of the fish know (though some hold a firm belief in a glorious place called The See where the invisible walls don't hold a fish back from swimming where he pleases). Life is pretty good in The Tank so long as the mysterious Hands are bringing you food and aren't attempting to yank you out of your home, never to be seen again.

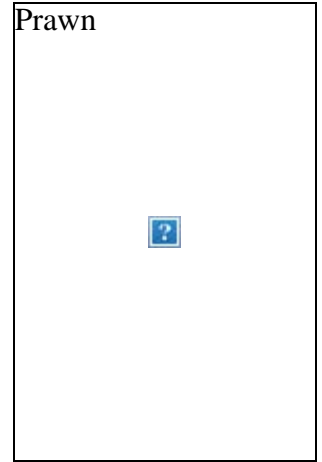
Character creation starts with a concept, some creature that would live in a fish tank or other small body of water. Limitations on amphibians and the like are between you and your Tank Master (about whom, see below). Once you've got a critter and some sort of background in mind, you flesh it out with Shticks (think about it for a moment; it'll come to you). These abilities and special actions are divided up into Column A, Column B, and Column C, with the Cs generally more powerful or useful than the As.

Shticks are your defining characteristics; other than Hit Points, you don't have any stats. These allow you to reproduce sea life in game terms. You can have Spines like a sea urchin, Clamp onto opponents in combat like a shark, or duplicate an eel's Shock. Other Shticks shake things up a bit more, like Denied!, which allows you to stop someone else using their Shtick, or the impressive Understand Humans that lets you in on what humans are saying.

The humans are those players outside the pool. They may come to feed the fish, collect them for cooking, or just gawk at them and tap on the glass. Collectively, they're the Horde, and they interact with denizens of The Tank with Hands, long sticks used to tap fish or drop food. Food from periodic feedings is used to gain Hit Points or restore those lost in combat.

The combat system involves holding out fingers. One fish, the Attacker, points at his target and declares a combat, making that fish the Defender. They hold out a number of fingers simultaneously, from one to five (but never more fingers than that fish has Hit Points -- you start with 7). If they hold out the same number of fingers, the Defender takes no damage; otherwise, the greater the difference, the more damage taken by the Defender. Then the Attacker and Defender switch and repeat until they decide to stop or one of them is out of Hit Points. Once the points are gone, that fish is incapacitated and may be at the mercy of other fish (who may wish to eat him for more Hit Points).

Aside from all the fish and Horde members, you'll also need three gamemasters called Tank Masters. The Diver Tank Master stays in the pool with the fish to adjudicate their combats and their uses of Shticks. The Horde TM watches over the Horde, deciding who approaches The Tank and whether they're there to feed or grab a fish. Overseeing



everything is the Coordinating TM, who makes sure everything runs smoothly between the two groups (the Horde stays out of sight until they approach The Tank).

The game is an interesting exercise, with clever ways of simulating the "experience" of being fish. Humans, for example, must speak gibberish around The Tank (most fish don't understand English and won't know the humans' motivations). Feeding time entails throwing floating food props to the fish, who then scurry about trying to get some of the life-preserving little morsels, and without the right shtick a character will lose Hit Points quickly if they leave The Tank. Copious notes help in creating the props, including: Hands for interacting with the fish; food that will float in the pool; and waterproof character sheets and Hit Point markers.

There are obvious limits -- for one thing, you have to field quite a crowd, which is one reason they suggest playing at a convention where a hotel can provide both the numbers and the pool. Pool safety is paramount and players must be more careful than their LARPing brethren, who are (presumably) on dry land. The game can be stressful, since everyone's wondering who's next and the group dynamics are more reminiscent of *Paranoia* than *Dungeons & Dragons*. Half the people involved are in a commanding position compared to the poor put-upon fish (who are already at one another's throats), so everyone must be mindful that those in the pool are all but powerless -- not your typical high-powered roleplaying experience. Oh, and you're fish.

There are several plots and subplots at work in the book's numerous pregenerated characters and storylines, most of which deal with turf wars between the Jets, Sharks, and Da Squid's mob, but not only is developing new ones hard, it's a lot of work to keep a pool full of people involved. Other game inconveniences include food rules being included on the player handouts and not in the text, and keeping track of the many physical representations of in-game concepts (while standing hip-deep in water). Campaigns are possible, if a group has the resources to tackle multiple sessions. Although the game is amusing, the fish aren't "in on it" and so a lot of the events will remain baffling to them until the post-game wrap-up.

The game is executed with wit and honest effort, not just a wink and a nod at a one-note joke, and though it isn't the most tightly managed set of rules, *Prawn* is an inexpensive diversion that makes the most of a limited -- and unusual -- set of circumstances.

--Andy Vetromile

Posterity Doesn't Need To Be A Pain In The Butt

One of the interesting aspects of roleplaying games in general is how ephemeral they are. Unlike movies, plays, improvisational music events, or even professional sporting events, there's no terribly good way to "save" roleplaying sessions for posterity. Audio and video recording aren't practical, full written transcripts are less so, and there are no "saved games" to reload later.

In a way this is (probably) good; the act of watching a roleplaying game -- especially one a couple of months later . . . *especially* if it's a game you weren't part of -- would probably be about as exciting as listening to *Moby Dick* in Pig Latin. But this is also bad, in a way . . . unlike your favorite board game, for example, where certain situations or incidents will repeat or be similar to other fun incidents ("Hey, look! The Good Goblin Fanatic has just encountered a Liche. . . *and* it turns out his Unicorn is actually a Werewolf!"), most of the best roleplaying incidents are unique, and completely unpredictable.

So what, then, can be done to preserve -- or at least codify -- the more memorable moments in a campaign?

Goals

But before going into the *hows*, we should define the *whys*. Why would you want to have a record of what has gone before?

Well, first off, it makes things much easier on [continuity](#); determining (or remembering) what has gone on before is *much* easier when there's a written record. Second, for character-driven games, having a record of what went before can be an invaluable means to gauge how a character has or hasn't developed. ("Wow; Dex Neptune was an impetuous, pompous jerk when he started his career . . . and now he's not impetuous!") Finally, it's a great way to keep memories of a game; in a long-running campaign there can be many accomplishments, feats, and character moments that are easily forgotten. ("Oh, that's right . . . we *did* meet the Prince. And Renaldo accidentally vomited on his shoes!")

Now, having stated the goals, let's look at the implications. Unlike recording, say, a child's dance recital -- where, should anyone ever watch it again, it will probably be to experience the whole thing -- most goals of wanting to preserve a roleplaying session revolve around only the "good bits"; you want to edit out the boring parts, the rules debates, the eight jillionth Monty Python digression.

Keeping this in mind, then, let's look at some ways to try and preserve at least some parts of a roleplaying session.

Journals

Many games encourage their players to keep journals as to what's going on in the game. This can be done in character (which is generally preferred) or out of character (which may be easier for some players). It's a good enough piece of advice, and I'll repeat it here.

On the other hand, there's one teeny problem with this plan: It usually doesn't work. At least, in none of the games I've run, played in, or seen first-hand, no attempts at journaling have lasted beyond two or three sessions. Even bribes of experience points or other in-game benefits have met with failure. (Of course, I'm certain that this advice doesn't apply to everyone, and I'm equally certain there are games whose players have filled notebook after notebook of post-game observations. But I would be shocked to learn this is common; in a world where it's challenging enough to get the gaming table chairs filled on a constant basis, making sure everyone puts in *extra* effort seems like a losing battle.)

Games that exist entirely on-line have an advantage here, of course, since copy-pasting is easy. But they also don't get to fling Cheez-Its at each other when they, say, forget the entry password *again* . . . so it's all a cosmic trade-off.

Rolls

If the goal of trying to record a session is to retain the "good bits," then many games will have as their good bits truly extraordinary (or unexpected) dice rolls. Some games go so far as to codify this; *Torg*, for example, has the Glory system, which dictates that certain spectacular rolls (along with an appropriately played card) will become stories of great renown and valor. But even if the game doesn't have such a system, adding one should be trivial for most games. Simply have each player (and the GM) keep two sheets of paper, one for Critical Successes and one for Critical Failures (assuming the game system has either or both). For each such roll, record the game-date (and possibly the real world date), what the roll was for, and the result.

Thus entries from various games might look like:

- "Fosfus 13th, 988 (8/12/01) -- diplomacy roll with Lord Plott D'vice -provided three legions to attack the Temple Of Dume (in-game line: 'If you don't sign that writ now, you're signing the death sentence of your nation.')
- "March 9th, 2001 (5/11/02) -- martial arts roll against ninjas in Los Angeles -- flipped one attacker into two others; tabloid reporter on-hand with a camera happened to capture event"
- "June 8, 2112 (7/22/02) -- Laser Pistol roll against Martian bounty hunters -- gun exploded in hand; hand required medical attention"
- "April 30th, 4998 (8/5/02) -- seduction roll with Selandra Decados' handmaid -- complete rejection; she had heard from a friend of a friend of the social exploits on Criticorum"

This technique tends to be very fast in play; it places much of the responsibility on the players, and is done during the game (usually while the GM is turning his attention to another player). This method can also have the side effect of encouraging the GM to be more creative with those Critical Success/Failure results; after all, if they will be recorded for posterity, then "You miss . . . um, and drop your sword." won't be terribly posteriffic. On the other hand, at best this method records a snapshot of the game; the most climactic or important scenes are often those without any Critical results. But for a gaming group that doesn't record anything of its past, this is at least a step in the right direction. And, as much as some players love to recount phenomenal rolls, this gives them a codified means of doing so.

Quotes

For more character-intensive results, recording the memorable quotes or pieces of dialog (in or out of game) can do much to preserve the "good" bits. Again, this can be as trivial as scribbling down the quote, giving an attribution (the player and the character, if applicable), the date, and whether it is in-character or out-of-character. In our *Werewolf* game, for example, Caitlin has taken on the responsibility of recording this dialog, and it's been remarkably successful. Some indulgent examples include:

IC:

- "Digital cameras don't steal your soul. They only borrow it." -- Ron (Alex Firewall) -- 1/5/02
- "Don't forget the hicks with shotguns!" -- Ruth (Katrina) -- 4/13/02

OOC:

- "Pay no attention to the man behind the Storyteller!" -- Mike -- 1/26/02
- "Evil needs s'mores!" -- Steven -- 3/9/02

Yes, the results of these lists will probably consist of many inside jokes and other seemingly random quotes. But if it lets your gaming group remember and laugh or groan together, then it may well be worth it. (And every quote from the game they recount is one less movie or TV quote . . .)

In-Game Excuses

Finally, many settings encourage in-game storytelling, especially of past exploits; *Torg*, again, has its Glory system, *Werewolf* has moots as the means of gaining prestige, and many games that feature the realm of dreams as a viable locale will be influenced by the recounting of dramatic tales. If you can incorporate these elements into the game often enough, then players will be encouraged to take notes as necessary, *and* the act of telling the stories will reinforce those tales in the group's collective mind. (And, for the GM, this can also be useful to see what's stuck with the group; if they keep recounting the time they destroyed Dr. Darkcoast's slaver operation, but never recount the time they engaged in political intrigues to thwart an imperial spy, then maybe the group wants more adventures like the former than the latter.)

Ironically, the best roleplaying campaigns are often those that rely on continuity and history, yet there is no foolproof easy way to record a campaign. Perhaps in the future there will be some technological means to overcome the fleeting nature of a gaming session; maybe the TiVo d20 will be able to record a six-hour gaming session and filter it down into two hours of watchable entertainment. But until then, with a bit of creativity and some dedication, your gaming group should be able to retain the bits that interest them most.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: Kill Doctor Lucky rules, p. 1

(*Four stars*) "In celebration of his 25th anniversary as city ruler, Lanuel has designated a contest for his subjects. Hidden just outside the city are clues leading to 25 platinum pieces and other treasures. This reward belongs to the clever and courageous person that solves a series of riddles. The contest starts at dawn, but thanks to your spying ability, you have a A24 [*sic*] on the Street Level with the clue, 'Start where the water stops. Forty-five feet west, take south door.'"

New Cards for Deluxe Illuminati

by Steve Honeywell

If you've played *Deluxe Illuminati* with the *Y2K* expansion pack, you may have noticed, as some gaming groups have, that the Discordians seem to win an awful lot of the time, and often win very quickly. Why is this? The answer is simple -- the influx of new cards is very heavy on Weird groups, giving the Discordians an excellent chance of winning. In a complete set of cards, they need only get five of 36 different groups, or about one in seven. At the same time, the Assassins need to pick up six Violent groups from a pool of 29, or slightly more than 20%, while poor Shangri-la needs to control five Peaceful groups from a set of just 19, which comes to over a fourth of the Peaceful groups in the game. Instead of banning the Discordians -- as may be tempting -- consider instead boosting their required number of Weird groups to six. It's still easier to find six Weird groups than six Violent groups or five Peaceful groups, but the fact that so many of the Weird groups aren't that useful balances this out.

In an effort to further level the playing field, the following 23 new groups are suggested. These groups have been carefully designed to increase the number of groups with rare alignments (namely Peaceful, but also Government, Fanatic, and Communist to a certain extent) without making things too easy for the Bermuda Triangle, and without adding a single Weird group. While Weird is still the most common alignment, it is now much more in line with the other common alignments of Straight, Liberal, Conservative, and Violent. The number of Criminal groups has also been boosted, since these groups do not in and of themselves represent the victory conditions of any specific Illuminati. Additionally, these new groups have been crafted so that they do not overlap the spheres of influence of the groups already present.

Finally, two new Special Action cards have been added to bring a little more variety to the game, adding power to groups and making each toss of the dice just a little bit riskier.

New Cards

Alternative Fuel Researchers

In Arrow -- Left

Out Arrows -- None

Power -- 0/1

Resistance -- 4

Income -- 1

Alignments -- Peaceful, Liberal

While most of the world runs on oil, coal, and electricity, the Alternative Fuel Researchers want to make the world a better place with the help of water power, solar power, burning cow chips, and anything else they can get their hands on. No one really takes them too seriously . . . until they have a breakthrough. The Alternative Fuel Researchers grant a +1 bonus on any attempts to control, neutralize, or destroy Multinational Oil Companies and Nuclear Power Companies.

The American Association of Really Old People

In Arrow -- Right

Out Arrows -- Down

Power -- 2

Resistance -- 6

Income -- 2

Alignments -- Conservative, Straight, Fanatic

This group of retirees can be rabid about asserting their rights, be it to cheap medical care, special treatment at movie theaters, or a free cup of coffee at the local bagel hut. Woe betide those who stand in the way of their walkers or are caught in the backdraft of their oxygen masks. The A.A.R.O.P. grants a +2 bonus on any attempt to control, neutralize, or destroy Drug Companies.

Chicago

In Arrow -- Left

Out Arrows -- Up, Right, Down

Power -- 5

Resistance -- 5

Income -- 3

Alignments -- Criminal, Violent, Liberal

It's the City that Works, the City with Big Shoulders, the City By the Lake, and the City with Too Many Nicknames. Gangsters, corruption, stockyards, bad baseball teams, and did we mention corruption? What's not to love for an Illuminated minion?

Congressional Subcommittees

In Arrow -- Right

Out Arrows -- Up, Down

Power -- 3/3

Resistance -- 2

Income -- 2

Alignments -- Government

They have fancy-sounding names, but when you come right down to it, these groups of fat cats are only too ready to shovel the pork toward their own Congressional district. While not overly powerful in their own right, the Congressional Subcommittees have an additional +2 for direct control of any Government group in addition to the normal bonus for having similar Alignments, since those Government groups want in on the pork as well.

The DMV

In Arrow -- Left

Out Arrows -- Up, Down

Power -- 2

Resistance -- 5

Income -- 1

Alignments -- Government, Criminal

Because waiting in line for six hours wasn't bad enough, the DMV was created. Where else can you go to be abused simply because you exist? The DMV grants a +2 on any attempt to do anything to the Ford Motor Company.

General Eccentric

In Arrow -- Left

Out Arrows -- Up, Down

Power -- 4

Resistance -- 5

Income -- 4

Alignments -- Conservative

Makers of electrical products for years, General Eccentric offers virtually every convenience for the modern day home. General Eccentric products are top of line, at least until the 90-day warrantee runs out, which explains their Income.

Health Clubs

In Arrow -- Right
Out Arrows -- Down
Power -- 2
Resistance -- 4
Income -- 2
Alignments -- Straight, Fanatic

Far into the future, the cultures that have evolved on this planet will dig down into the earth and find the remains of health clubs. When they do, they will become convinced that we were a culture obsessed with pain. Health Clubs have a +2 bonus for direct control of the International Steroid Consortium.

Infomercials

In Arrow -- Left
Out Arrows -- Up
Power -- 1
Resistance -- 0
Income -- 4
Alignments -- Criminal, Fanatic

Anyone who has ever watched television in the wee hours has seen these useless products available in just three easy payments, pitched by overly perky automatons. Infomercials are that rare breed of fanatic who actually encourages other fanatics, allowing them to control other Fanatics without penalty for opposing alignments.

International Steroid Consortium

In Arrow -- Left
Out Arrows -- Up, Right
Power -- 3
Resistance -- 4
Income -- 3
Alignments -- Criminal

Self-improvement at the cost of self-destruction is the motto of this group, who strive to create a world where everyone wears muscle shirts and doesn't have a neck. This group has a +2 for direct control of Professional Sports, Professional Wrestling, and the Olympics.

Karaoke Machines

In Arrow -- Left
Out Arrows -- None
Power -- 0
Resistance -- 1
Income -- 3
Alignments -- Communist, Criminal

Is there anyone who truly likes these machines of horror, evil, and truly terrible music? Regardless of whether or not they do, these things have pervaded the world. They grant their possessor a +1 on any attempt to neutralize.

Krapp Foods

In Arrow -- Right
Out Arrows -- Down, Left
Power -- 3
Resistance -- 5
Income -- 5
Alignments -- Conservative

When you think about down-home, nutritious cooking, you think about mom. When you think about processed, starchy, fat-ridden foodstuffs past their expiration date, think of Krapp Foods.

Magazine Publishers

In Arrow -- Right
Out Arrows -- Up, Down, Left
Power -- 5
Resistance -- 3
Income -- 4
Alignments -- None

Purveyors of opinion on everything from the best way to make crab cakes to national foreign policy, magazine publishers shape the thought of the nation, all for just \$3.95 an issue. The Magazine Publishers grant a +2 on any attempts to control Junk Mail, the Post Office, and Tabloids.

Maintenance Crews

In Arrow -- Right
Out Arrows -- None
Power -- 0/2
Resistance -- 4
Income -- 1
Alignments -- None

When the executives finish their workday, they leave their offices behind so they can be cleaned. What they don't realize is that the Maintenance Crews who do that cleaning have complete access to their files and plans. By spending 5MB off this group, their owner can interfere with any privileged attack.

Mimes

In Arrow -- Right
Out Arrows -- None
Power -- 0
Resistance -- 2
Income -- 0
Alignments -- Communist, Peaceful

On the human food chain of hatred, there are politicians, there are lawyers, and then there are the Mimes. With their white face paint and black and white clothing, Mimes present a world where everyone appears the same. While some are charmed by their antics, most simply wish they'd go away. Because of this, the Mimes give their possessor an additional +1 on any attempt to neutralize.

National Public Radio

In Arrow -- Right

Out Arrows -- Left

Power -- 1

Resistance -- 5

Income -- 1

Alignments -- Liberal, Peaceful, Communist

News, information, and entertainment, all offered by soothing voices . . . speaking . . . very . . . slowly . . . and . . . calmly. You can feel your mind drifting off to sleep while you listen to the sounds of the woodlands. NPR has a +1 on any attempts for control of the Anti-Nuclear Activists, Antiwar Activists, and Health Food Stores.

The Olympics

In Arrow -- Right

Out Arrows -- Left

Power -- 1

Resistance -- 5

Income -- 0

Alignments -- Peaceful, Straight

Ah, the joys of watching professional athletes compete for new sponsor money. Ah, the unparalleled pleasures of watching hulking brutes play sports you've never heard of and will never hear of again . . . at least until the next Olympics. The Olympics has no income of its own, but on the turn following their being controlled and every four turns after, the Olympics declares an Olympiad, boosting their sponsor's incomes by 1 for that turn, the sponsors being the other groups controlled by the same Illuminati. The income of the Illuminati group itself is unaffected.

Poets

In Arrow -- Left

Out Arrows -- None

Power -- 0

Resistance -- 6

Income -- 0

Alignments -- Communist, Liberal

No one listens to Poets, do they? Like Cassandra, Poets seem to know what's going on but nobody seems to care. Regardless, Poets offer their possessor a +2 bonus on any attempts to control, neutralize, or destroy Universities and Intellectuals.

Professional Wrestling

In Arrow -- Right

Out Arrows -- Up, Down

Power -- 4/2

Resistance -- 4

Income -- 4

Alignments -- Violent, Fanatic

Big, violent men with microphones and Spandex tights might frighten small children, but they make a barrel full of money. Their violent tendencies in the ring are just a facade -- they're much more violent in real life. Professional Wrestling grants the possessor a +2 on any attempts to destroy.

Student Government

In Arrow -- Left

Out Arrows -- None

Power -- 0

Resistance -- 1

Income -- 0

Alignments -- Peaceful, Liberal

Before they become big, powerful government officials in the real world, politicians-to-be hone their skills in Student Government in high schools and colleges around the world. Student Governments are powerless, easily dominated, and have no income to speak of. However, most of the Government remembers their Student Government days with fondness, giving this group's possessor a +2 on any attempt to control Government groups.

Texas Implements

In Arrow -- Right

Out Arrows -- Up, Left

Power -- 3

Resistance -- 5

Income -- 2

Alignments -- Conservative

Once a powerful player in the microelectronics industry, the star of Texas Implements has faded somewhat in recent years. They still maintain their fierce independence, though, at least until someone makes them a willing puppet.

Theme Restaurants

In Arrow -- Right

Out Arrows -- Down, Left

Power -- 2

Resistance -- 2

Income -- 4

Alignments -- Communist

They're everywhere with their menus filled with exotic, trendy meals that are all, at a very basic level, the same thing over and over. They've all got kooky antiques on their walls. They've all got drink specials served by glassy-eyed robots. They're all different in the same way. Nothing makes the Illuminated more comfortable.

Toll Booth Operators

In Arrow -- Left

Out Arrows -- South

Power -- 1

Resistance -- 4

Income -- 2

Alignments -- Criminal, Government

You pay taxes to build roads so that the government can charge you money to drive on those same roads. Only in a truly Illuminated world would this concept not only make sense, but be a part of everyday life. Thanks to their constant income, Toll Booth Operators offer an additional free money transfer every turn.

Travel Agents

In Arrow -- Left

Out Arrows -- North

Power -- 1

Resistance -- 3

Income -- 2

Alignments -- Peaceful

Why waste your own valuable time booking a trip to an insect-infested, disease-ridden hellhole when you can have someone overcharge you for the exact same vacation? Travel Agents offer a +3 bonus on any attempt to control, neutralize, or destroy Airlines.

New Special Action Cards

Recruitment Drive

A massive wave of publicity causes the general public to swarm the group with influence. This card grants a permanent +1 to the power of any group, including groups that otherwise have no power. Groups with no power who have a Recruitment Drive gain an outgoing arrow directly opposite their inward control arrow. Of course, this also means that this group can be destroyed just like any other group. Using this card is not an action.

Spin Doctors

The influence of these masters of public relations can affect the result of any die roll by up to two in either direction, turning success into failure and snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. This card may be played after any die roll, and can adjust the roll either in favor of or against the attacker. Playing this card affects the use of the Assassination or Murphy's Law cards. Using this card is not an action.

De Arcanis Catholicae II: The Church Arcane

by Jeremiah Genest & Adam Bank

*This document is a continuation of matters philosophical and arcane within the early Christian church, as previously discussed in the missive ["De Arcanis Catholicae: The Church Arcane"](#). Although directed toward those with an interest in the works of **Ars Magica**, there are matters herein that should be of interest to many dramas that take place in the early centuries of the second millenium.*

*--Steven Marsh
Archmaga of Pyramid*

Saint Augustine

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), although educated as a Christian in his youth, followed different faiths before discovering his true calling. In Carthage, already a full professor at the age of 19, he joined the Manicheans, a religion that borrowed from Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Babylonian mythology, and elements of Christianity. At the age of 29, he studied under the Platonists of Milan.

Four years later, while tending his garden in Milan, he was struck by an overwhelming epiphany and devoted himself to Christ. He applied the rigorous logic and reasoning of Aristotle and the Platonists to Christian doctrine. As Bishop of Hippo, he became the most influential Christian theologian in history. Only the Bible itself rivals Augustine's writings in defining what it means to be Christian in the medieval world.

Saint Augustine Against Magic

Church pronouncements against magic restate the initial position of Saint Augustine, because all magicians eventually truck with demons and thereby commit the grave sin of idolatry. The learning of magic, declared Augustine, reduces to the vice of *curiositas*, "aimless erudition," and the passion to know unnecessary things. The "curious mind" implies an intellectual, meddlesome busybody who pries into things God wishes to lie undiscovered. God created nature as a mystery, but God also made the world in accordance to reason. Thus, many of its secrets, while occult, are knowable to mortal man.

God made Adam last on the sixth day, Augustine argued, not as His ultimate creation, but to shield the process of creation from Adam's eyes. To search out the mysteries of nature God chose to hide from Adam, as we brazen magi attempt to do, crosses the bounds of legitimate intellectual inquiry. Magicians, said Augustine, challenge God's majesty, trespassing into the realm of forbidden knowledge.

All sin originates in either the lust of the flesh, the ambition of the world, or the lust of the eyes. The grave vice of curiosity emerges from the lust of the eyes. Vision, our greatest sense, analogizes the process of discovering knowledge. The gaze of a magus upon a grimoire amounts to a lurid glare of a glutton.

Learning for the pursuit of salvation is virtuous, but learning for its own sake leads to pride, the cause of Adam's Fall. Magic is the worst forbidden knowledge, as the magician seeks to know high things by means of the low, and then glorify himself to the world with his illicit marvels.

Augustine Against Transcendence

Augustine attacked philosophy's doctrine of the soul as he did magic. To claim that philosophers carried a spark of God within their bodies, allowing transcendence and reincarnation, was a terrible sin of pride. God in His perfection is inviolate and wholly separate from mortal man. At birth, the body and soul for the first time enter the world as unique images of their Creator, not elements of Him. Separated at death, the body and soul reunite for the final Judgment.

The Three Books

Saint Augustine's great work, *On Christian Doctrine* (treat as two summae: summa on Church Lore, Level 5, Quality 12, and summa on Theology, Level 6, Quality 12), inspired the creation and framework of secular and parochial of all types. While the study of magic stemmed from sin, Saint Augustine considered education itself virtuous because it assisted the understanding and appreciation of holy Scripture. Prying into nature to better oneself, on the other hand, lead to vice and diabolism.

Augustinian schools broke learning down into the pursuit of three kinds of wisdom, or three books. The utmost wisdom is inscribed in the book of life, the book containing God's own knowledge, the meaning and plan for everything in the universe. Through study, the virtuous scholar hopes to catch glimpses of the book's pages.

To approach the book of life, one must first study the book of scripture -- the Bible itself. The Scriptures tell of a world created and cared for by God. With the revelations of the Bible, the scholar can study the world itself, the book of nature, as God intended. The virtuous scholar teaches and studies arts and sciences as a path to salvation. Philosophers and magicians ignore the Scriptures at their own peril.

Anselm and the Nature of the Soul and Spirit

Although early Christian theologians readily believed soul entered the world at birth, the process of generation vexed them. Is the soul freshly created at conception, or does it arise from the growth of the body? This seemingly trivial question possessed great implications for Christian doctrine. If the soul arises from the body, logic dictates the soul dies when the body dies. If unique, new souls originate at conception, how could original sin attach?

Augustine first proposed this dilemma, still officially unresolved in the 13th century. The priest Anselm of Canterbury, by solidifying the Christian notion of original sin, bypassed the problem. In Jesus, God became a man, but remained free of original sin. Further, Adam and Eve, although later tainted with sin, were created sinless. Thus, Anselm concluded, original sin is not essential to the nature of the human soul.

Anselm separated the natura, the essential nature shared by all humans, from the persona, that which makes each person unique. Original sin belongs in the realm of persona. The rational soul, however, belongs to natura. Thus, Anselm concluded, the soul is not the source of original sin, and Augustine's dilemma therefore need not be answered.

Anselm's thesis was adopted by the Order of Hermes as the difference between the spirit and the soul. The spirit is persona, malleable with Mentem magic, and can persist in the mortal realm and faerie lands as ghosts, elementals, and others. The soul is natura, a reflection of the perfect Divine, the house of reason and free will, and impervious to magic.

Sign of Beauty

Symbol: The Sign has no known symbol.

Motto: "Everything is good." (Borrowed from the Bible)

Patron: Dionysus the Areopagite and John Scotus Erigena

House Affiliations: Any

Flaw Requirements: None

Origin Myth: The Garden of Eden awaits. Hidden behind every corner lies the Garden of Eden, home to those few who have returned to the original, primordial state of perfection of Adam and Eve. The Gift to work magic is the gift of access to Eden. When magi reach beyond their senses and achieve pure intellect, the Garden of Eden opens to them.

Levels of Initiation: Members undergo an initiatory quest upon acceptance to the Sign. Thereafter, initiates attend ceremonies where they discuss and share their achievements. Members who possess inner mysteries share them with those who have furthered the study of nature.

Goals and practices: Members of the Sign see all nature, from the pleasing to the grotesque, as emanations of Divine glory. The study of nature leads to an understanding of the Divine and therefore great power.

The Sign considers itself an observer of nature and its wonders. Rather than hunt exotic flora, fauna, and terra for vis, members of the Sign seek to capture and study. In the Hibernian Tribunal, the Sign is working on a grand project of replicating Eden, and perhaps Arcadia, on Earth. Using sacred geometry to link and widen regiones, the Sign populates enchanted zoos with magical and faerie animals and plants from all over the world. Its members hope someday to unite a faerie and magical regio to recreate what they believe must have been the conditions of "pure nature" in the Garden of Eden, but so far all experiments have been in vain.

Virtues Taught: Animal Ken (+1), Magical Imagination (+1), Affinity with Beasts of Legend (+2), Augury (+3), Sacred Architecture (+4)

Dionysus the Areopagite

This convert of Saint Paul penned a series of Greek treatises and letters uniting Platonic philosophy with Christian theology and mysticism. John Scotus Erigena translated these works into Latin in the late 9th century. Hugh of Saint-Victor, Albertus Magnus, and even Thomas Aquinas wrote commentaries on them in the 12th and 13th centuries. Some confusion exists as to the author's true identity. Many 13th century French scholars identify him with Saint Denys.

Dionysus describes a complete theology, from the Trinity and angelic world, the incarnation of Christ and the redemption of humanity, to the end times, providing a mystical explanation of the entire universe. The One entered the material world through the incarnation of the Word in Christ, the Son of God. God Himself lies beyond any rational comprehension, although one may reach limited understanding of aspects of God, such as of Good, Beauty, Being, and Love. Worship and prayer to God require contemplation, the abandonment of physical senses and intelligible forms, for the celebrant to experience "light from the divine darkness" and ecstatic union with the One.

John Scotus Erigena

The First and fundamental division of all things which can be grasped by the mind or lie beyond its grasp is into those that are and those that are not. Nature is the general name for all things, for those that are and those that are not. --The beginning of Erigena's metaphysics

John Scotus Eriugena (810-877 AD), is an influential and famous theologian from Ireland. Eriugena's masterwork is the *Periphyseon* ("On the Division of Nature"). It begins by explaining the difference between existence and nonexistence. If you can perceive something with the five senses, it does not actually exist. Only the objects of thought, the considerations of the priests and philosophers, truly exist.

Eriugena divides all nature into four things: God, the beginning of the universe, who creates but is not Himself created; the ideas of God, which God created and perform acts of creation themselves; God, the end of the universe, the "all in all."

All things eventually return to their source . . . not only souls, but also matter. Perfection can be achieved in life through the process of deification, through which the body and soul become one with God.

Initiation Seed

Adam's Kidneys: The Psalmists have long sought the Chemeu, the book of angelic alchemy. In the covenant's library is a book given to one of the players by a former master as part of an Apprentice Gauntlet. A magus of little

consequence wrote the book, and its scores are unspectacular. In the marginalia of the book, however, the author makes a slight digression, and states "Here be lying the tombs of one Penhayu that spoke unto me whilst I had a rightly fitful dream:

"Hail, El Bathuriel, giver of power,
as he replies to the angels!
Hail, Adonai! Hail, Eloï! Hail, Abrasax! Hail, Yothael!
Hail, Mizrael, who has beheld the face of the father in the power of Yao!
I adjure you by the first seal, which is put on the body of Adam.
I adjure you by the second seal, which is upon the limbs of Adam.
I adjure you by the third seal, which seals the kidneys and the heart of Adam as he lies upon the earth.
The father established him, he breathed into his face,
he filled him with the breath of life unto this vessel.
Amen Amen Amen! Sousa Sousa Sousa!"

The strange excerpt is accompanied by a latitude coordinate.

Nothing will come of it unless a player brings the subject up at a Tribunal or other gather where storyguide magi are present. If so, Psalmists, True Teachers, and the Cabal of the Golden Bee will descend upon the covenant like a biblical plague. It seems the odd snippet has a powerful meaning to these mystae, as it contains the one sentence known from the Chemeu, used only in the deepest of initiation rituals. They all demand, threaten, beg, and bribe for the entire prayer and the coordinate. The hope the prayer will open a regio tomb where the Chemeu and a fallen angel (or Old One) is buried.

The Pure Teachers

Symbol: Two winged Cherubim, facing apart

Motto: "The help of God's spirit."

Patrons: The Pure Teachers claim all those who work miracles in God's name as theirs.

House Affiliations: Any except Tytalus

Flaw Requirements: Vow (To live a moral life) -1

Origin Myth: Their well-known origin myth begins with Adam, the first discoverer, who engraved his true magic on two stone tablets. After the Flood, Noah discovered one tablet on Mount Ararat. From this tablet came the diverse occult sciences. Abraham, himself a great astrologer, brought this knowledge to Egypt, and from there the secrets of magic radiated across the world. Magic, in its purest form, is purely good.

Levels of Initiation: The Teachers structure their society much like a crusading Order (Mythic Europe, Dragon and the Bear, page 40). The highest initiation of the Teachers supposedly involves the mysterious second tablet of Adam.

Goals and practices: The Pure Teachers are the largest organization of Christian theurgists in the Order. Like many medieval philosophers, the Teachers view daemons as lesser angels of the upper air. Unlike Psalmists, the Teachers believe Hermetic magic is already perfect, the pinnacle of human endeavor spanning back to the first words of Adam.

Like any pure substance, however, Hermetic magic can be corrupted. The Pure Teachers fight against corruption from a perspective very similar to the Church. The Corruption of Tytalus, for example, has forever tainted that House, and the Teachers shall never accept a Tytalus magus into their society.

Just as angels no longer walk the Earth, the Teachers do not think the estate of magi should interact with mortals unless on the side of God. The Teachers support House Flambeau's aggression against the Moors, for example, as a holy crusade.

Virtues Taught: All theurgical mystae Virtues, Sense Holiness and Unholiness (+1 Virtue).

Initiation Seed

Diligent Eyes: The Pure Teachers distance themselves from magi and their companions who have Discredited

Lineage, Diabolic Upbringing, or Tainted with Evil Flaws. In the eyes of the Pure Teachers, such people are forever damned. A player magus can easily become a lowest-rank initiate of the Pure Teachers by taking a vow to watch and report on their doomed convent-mate's activities.

The Cult of the Elchasaites

Symbol: Two angelic figures astride a globe.

Motto: From the Heavens Pour Benefices

Patron: Alcibiades, Elchasai

House Affiliations: Any

Flaw Requirements: Vow (To abstain from all earthly pleasures) -2

Origin Myth: In 221 AD, Alcibiades of Apamea unearthed a book written by the holy man containing Elchasai or Helxai. The book contained revelations given to Elchasai by a tremendous angel, 96 miles in height, 24 miles wide, and stomping across the Earth leaving footprints 14 miles long. This angel was the Son of God accompanied by a female of corresponding size who was the Holy Spirit. The text imposed secrecy upon those initiated into its mysteries. The Cult of Elchasaites, which seeks the gnosis and the entrance to heaven through astrology, descends from Alcibiades.

Levels of Initiation: Members aspire upwards along ranks named for the seven planets, initiating into new secrets at each level.

Goals and practices: The inner group of Hebdomads, named after the seven planets, control the Cult from a hidden island in the Euphrates located in the Levant Tribunal, where they disperse the Cult's gnostic wisdom. Members of the Cult seek to understand the heavens through practical astrology. With that understanding, they plan to physically enter heaven itself. They point to many writings in the Church as proof that this can be done.

Virtues Taught: All astrology mystae Virtues, Secret Vis Source +1*, Destiny +4 (You will ascend into Heaven by the knowledge gained from the heavens)

* The Cult's secrets concerning the effect of the stars on terrestrial matter allow its members to find and extract vis where others cannot.

Appendix Z: What's Wrong With It?

by Matt Riggsby

Favorite objects in fiction have personality. Personality, in this context, usually means problems. The *Millennium Falcon's* hyperdrive is monumentally faulty, and Fibber McGee's closet will dump its contents on anybody foolhardy enough to open the door. GMs can use this list to give interesting, frustrating personality to any device, vehicle, or complex sub-system, from a radio to a starship air-recycler to a radium-fueled assault ornithopter. They can be used to reflect the effects of damage or age or to justify letting characters buy an otherwise functional device for a reduced price. Pick an appropriate problem (or several problems), decide how severe they are, and let your players struggle to keep their gadget working under trying conditions.

- **Overheats easily:** After a period of use (a half-hour to an hour for most gadgets), the device's performance starts to suffer. Readings and displays become erratic, gears start to grind, or it starts to give off a strange smell. The wise user will turn it off and let it cool down. The device can be used for a while longer, but it won't work at optimum, and longer use can lead to total shutdown and quite possibly damage.
- **Hates cold starts:** It's hard to turn the device on if it hasn't been used for a while. There's a small (say, 10%) chance the device won't start on the first attempt, with the chance increasing in particularly cold conditions. Alternatively, the device will start but needs a little time to warm up and start functioning at full capacity. If that type of device already needs time to warm up (for example, a steam engine or a vacuum tube radio), this particular gadget takes twice as long.
- **Needs a good whack:** There's a loose or balky connection somewhere inside the device which no technician has been able to find yet. It needs a good, solid whack in just the right place to work properly. If this requires a die roll, it will be related to sheer luck or familiarity with the device, not technical skill.
- **Needs fiddling:** The device always needs fine tuning to work properly. It loses fine control from time to time, so a little bit of tweaking knobs here and there is necessary. Once set, it will work properly until restarted or it is required to do something else (bring in a different channel, access a new peripheral, etc.).
- **Sensitive to shock:** The device works well if it is kept physically stable, but it will stop working if it is hit or shaken too hard. It will need a few moments of fiddling before it will work again.
- **Needs feng shui:** The device is sensitive to hard-to-define aspects of its environment. It may work better in some parts of a room than another, turned to face a particular direction, or tilted at a particular angle. Communications equipment often suffers from this problem. ("Can you hear me now? How about now?")
- **Noisy:** The device works well, but loudly. In its milder form, this is an annoying hum or buzz which will make its operation hard to hide. In an extreme form, it can cause severe hearing problems.
- **Leaks:** The device slowly leaks some kind of fluid: fuel, motor oil, lubricant, water, etc. It may lose the fluid from an internal reservoir, but devices with integral cooling systems may create condensed water droplets. In addition to making slippery puddles, it can make it easier to track a user carrying it around.
- **Vibration:** The device shakes and vibrates. This may be just a trivial annoyance. However, it can be a significant problem if it vibrates hard enough to shake itself from its housing or simply to numb the hand of the user if they hold it for too long.
- **Intermittent power outages:** From time to time, the device just stops working. If the owner is fortunate, there will be some warning (the engine will start making noises, the display flickers). It may restart on its own, or it may need to be restarted manually.
- **Eats power:** The device operates properly but inefficiently. It runs through battery power or fuel at least 25% faster than normal.
- **Eats consumables:** The device uses lubricants, coolants, oxygen, or other consumable substances at least 25% faster than normal.
- **Hard to control:** The device runs, but it's difficult to tell it what to do. Steering is sluggish, it's hard to turn valves, or control buttons are sticky or don't always make electrical contacts close.
- **Hard to stop:** The device starts and operates normally, but it's hard to turn off. After it is deactivated, it will continue to hum, rattle, or glow for a minute or two.
- **Needs frequent maintenance/cleaning:** The device can't keep itself in good repair. Bolts and screws loosen

themselves, gauges fall out of adjustment, and it seems like a magnet for dust. The owner must spend more time than usual tending it.

- **Duct tape repairs:** The device has been repaired hastily. Important wires are held together with tinfoil or parts are held on with sturdy tape. Aesthetic problems aside, the device is inherently fragile and may fall apart if it has to work hard. It is, though, rather obvious where the repairs were made, making it easier to put things back together when necessary.

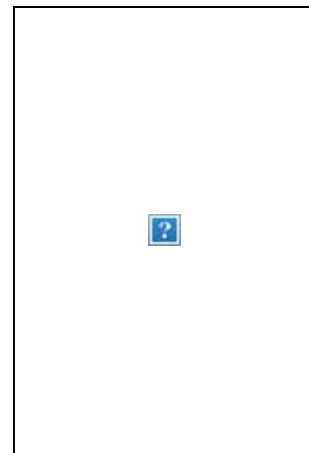
Pyramid Review

When Darkness Comes: The Awakening

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Written by Todd A. Breitenstein and Kerry Breitenstein

Illustrated by Dave Aikins



boxed set; \$29.95

Although Twilight Creations might be a new name to you, their designers should not be. Todd and Kerry Breitenstein already have a hit under their belts with [Zombies!!!](#), the game they created while working as part of the Journeyman Press design team, a division of the United States Playing Card Company. When they were let go, the designers decided to strike out on their own, and although they have since gained the license for [Zombies!!!](#), they have also continued working on designs of their own. So, hot on the heels of [Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps\(e\)](#) (the first expansion set for [Zombies!!!](#)) comes the first all-new game from Twilight Creations, Inc.

That game is *When Darkness Comes: The Awakening*, described as a "Modern Day Horror Setting" for the "Variable Tile System." There are two things that you initially notice about *When Darkness Comes*. The first is its weight, and the second is the attractive gruesomeness of the box art. Like [Zombies!!!](#) and its expansion set, *When Darkness Comes* has been fully illustrated by Dave Aikins; if you consider that [Zombies!!!](#) won the 2001 Origins Award for "Best Graphic Presentation of a Board Game," it should tell you how good it really does look. In fact, the art may well be better, as Aikins has to provide a greater range of illustrations and is allowed to do so to a slightly larger scale. Speaking of scales, this box tips the scales at almost two pounds! So what do you get for that weight? Inside the box, *When Darkness Comes* contains . . .

- A 16-page rulebook
- A 64-page scenario book
- A pad of 32 character sheets
- 15 six-inch square building tiles
- Six pewter one-inch tall miniatures
- 10 six-sided dice -- nine white, one red
- 50 encounter disks
- 10 disks numbered one to ten
- 10 "Failure" disks
- Six "No Door" disks
- 20 damage disks

The tiles represent various buildings within a small city, and include a Game Store, Food Mart, Clinic, City Hall & Jail, Bank, Bar, Café, Church with adjoining Graveyard, School (which takes up two tiles), Warehouse, Gun Shop, House, Library, and Museum. Marked in one-inch squares, the buildings are quite detailed. Some squares are marked with "?" to indicate encounter disk placement, while others contain a "!" which indicate a scenario-specific location. Doors may be marked with one, two, or three lock symbols to indicate how difficult they are to pick. Characters can move around these tiles as in the real world -- through unlocked or broken doors and windows and not through walls but over fences. Movement through the streets is doubled, but slows as soon as a character enters any building.

Like the tiles, all of the disks are cut from 1/16th inch thick card. They are an inch in diameter and come in several

types. The 10 numbered disks are used in conjunction with the scenario instructions; "No Door" disks are placed after a door has been broken down, and "Damage" disks are gained when a player is hurt. "Failure" disks are earned whenever a player's actions arouse suspicions (fail a security skill check, kick in a door or window, or fail to persuade a potential ally to join them) and when a player accrues three of them, they lose all of their "Failure," item and ally disks. Encounter disks come in four colors: the light blue Item disks can be picked and used to add dice to skill checks; the yellow Ally disks enable certain skill checks to be re-rolled, or they can be sacrificed to prevent a character suffering a point of damage; the green Security disks represent the various guards, dogs, alarms, and property owners that a character might find inside a building once they have gained entrance; and the red Adversary disks are the enemy! They can be vampires, mummies, zombies, skeletons and things that man was not meant to know.

To play *When Darkness Comes*, players have the choice of taking one of the six pregenerated characters or of creating their own using the provided pad of blank character sheets. The six pregenerated and prenamed sheets are double-sided, with a nice illustration on the front along with the statistics and a cheat sheet of the game's necessary tables on the reverse. All characters are defined by seven attributes, their associated skills, and the mobile phone that they all begin play with and cannot lose during the game -- this is to enable communication between the players! The attributes are Speed (movement), Attack (offensive combat and strength checks), Dexterity/Initiative, Intelligence (mostly perception), Persuasion, Medical, and Defense/Health (defensive combat checks and a measure of how much damage a character can suffer). To create a character, 20 points are divided between the attributes -- with a minimum of two and a maximum five -- and 10 points spent on skills. These can be bought at two levels; if it costs three points or less, it only adds a single die to the skill check, and if it costs more than three it adds two dice to the skill check. The whole process takes less than five minutes. The advantage of playing self-created characters is that, unlike the pregenerated, they can gain experience and grow between scenarios. Guidelines are included should a player wish to create a character with a particular occupation, including cop, doctor, and thief, among others.

A matching sculpted pewter miniature accompanies each pregenerated sheet. These are a little flat in comparison with the current style for most miniatures, and they do need to be prepared before they can be used in play. Spurs and flash need removing to keep the tiles from becoming scratched, though none of this will be of any difficulty to those used to this sort of thing.

To get a game of *When Darkness Comes* started, players select or create a character and decide upon a scenario, which they will play through until there is a winner. Each scenario includes special set up instructions for both the tiles and encounter disks. As the game progresses, the characters will explore the tiles, looking for allies and items to aid them, while hoping that they are capable enough to overcome any adversary or security disks encountered. If the scenario allows it, they can move off the edge of one tile and onto a newly placed one. At this point, the "!" and "?" are seeded with the appropriate encounter disks. During their turn, a player can do three things in any order: communicate with the players and possibly barter with them for aid in one form or another, move their character, and undertake a single action. Actions include entering a locked building; make a perception check to look for items in a room; healing another character; make an ally; pick up or drop an item, or give it to another character; and turning and dealing with an encounter or scenario specific disk. Alternatively, a player can forego these three actions and have the character spend their turn healing.

To do anything, a player rolls a number of dice equal to the level of the skill check they are attempting. If a character lacks the relevant skill, then the roll defaults to the appropriate attribute. Players are trying to achieve set target numbers by getting certain types of dice rolls. These start out at "six high," then go up through "one pair," "three straight," "three of a kind," "four straight," "four of a kind," "five straight," and finally "five of a kind" -- running from Target Number one up to eight respectively. Achieve certain Target Numbers and a character will be able to open locks, beat monsters, persuade allies, and so on. These numbers are marked on the tiles in the case of the doors and on the appropriate encounter disks.

Rolling for movement is handled slightly differently. A number of dice equal to a character's Speed score is rolled, but the dice used must include the single red or "Fate" die. If this die comes up as score of one, the player makes an additional roll on the "Oh Crap" table or on the "Woohoo" table if the result on the Fate die is a six. These two tables can gain or lose a character allies and items, keep doors locked or open them, half or double movement and so on.

When a player makes a Target Number with their roll, they also receive Victory Points equal to that Target Number. Likewise, Victory Points can be gained for overcoming adversaries and security, picking up items, gaining allies and achieving scenario specific objectives. Throughout the game, players can spend their Victory Points to reroll skill checks, add more dice to a roll, get rid of a "Failure" disk, buy points to acquire or upgrade skills or to even negate a roll on the "Oh Crap" table. Players need to husband their Victory Points with care, as the one with the most at the game's end -- after a scenario's goals have been met -- is declared the winner. His prize is an experience point that can be used to improve an attribute so long as it is not raised above a maximum of six.

There are six scenarios included in the thick scenario booklet, each prefaced by a full page piece of Dave Aikins art -- all unfortunately in black and white -- followed by two to three pages of fiction and the actual details of the scenario. They include two written and designed by Todd Breitenstein, two by Matt Forbeck and one each by Hal Mangold and Mark Bordenet. Together they send the players up against zombies, vampires, a mummy, re-animated skeletons and yet more zombies! It would have been nice to see a little more variety in the adversaries -- perhaps a werewolf or a space alien?

Up until this point, *When Darkness Comes* has been a fun game for up to six players. It could possibly be played solo, but some of the scenarios would be present a tough challenge played this way. Essentially, the game is not a blast-'em-up like *Zombies!!!* It is instead, a game in which cooperation between the players is very much encouraged and occasionally the key to winning the game. Ultimately though, there can only be one winner at end of the game.

Yet *When Darkness Comes* can also be run as a refereed game, the point of which is to both increase its roleplaying aspect and the tension within a scenario. The rules for running a refereed game are slightly looser than for the standard version, so as to adhere to a little more to real world logic. Two examples include removing the need to roll for movement and just using the Speed attribute score as movement points, and allowing characters to move diagonally as well as in the cardinal directions. In general, the rules for GM-run games are far from difficult, and anyone with a little GM experience of any roleplaying game will find that running *When Darkness Comes* easy enough. This method of running *When Darkness Comes* is supported by three linked adventures found in the scenario booklet. Written by Patrick Kapera, they make up the first three chapters of "Two of Lesser Evils," a campaign that will continue in forthcoming releases for *When Darkness Comes*. To accompany the pieces of fiction, there is a walkthrough for each chapter that can be run by the GM. Besides a set-up, they include numerous pieces of color text that should be read out when the characters enter or interact with a particular area. That said, the GM would need to read each of the pieces of fiction to get the most of out of these walkthroughs.

As a game, *When Darkness Comes: The Awakening* draws comparisons with the fantasy boardgames *Heroquest* and *Warhammer Quest*, but leans more towards horror boardgames such as *Arkham Horror* -- Chaosium's boardgame of the classic RPG, *Call of Cthulhu*, and *Minion Hunter*, the boardgame set in the world of GDW's *Dark Conspiracy* RPG. Like those boardgames, there is some record keeping involved in playing *When Darkness Comes*, as players must keep track of the Victory Points they accrue and spend. Further like *Arkham Horror*, there is a strong collaborative element to *When Darkness Comes*. Over all, *When Darkness Comes* looks more complicated than it actually is and the (at first glance) odd dice-rolling mechanic does not help this. Yet, once you get playing, it makes sense and the game actually plays quite quickly because the players only have a limited number of actions per turn.

But above all and like *Zombies!!!* before it, *When Darkness Comes* is game to tinker with. This is built-in because of the scenario concept, and players are going to want to design their own, as well as adding new adversaries and tiles of their own creation. It screams out for more tiles and it would be great to see sets depicting a shopping mall or an underground lab, but then the floor plans from Steve Jackson Games are *the* perfect scale to use with *When Darkness Comes*. If one's imagination run away enough, expansion sets based upon fifties B-movies or even *The Simpsons* could also be very entertaining, but those who don't want to go *quite* so extreme can combine this game with *Frag* or *Zombies!!!*

When Darkness Comes: The Awakening takes the designers of *Zombies!!!* and *ebay: the Card Game* in a slightly different direction, combining roleplaying with the tactical elements for this new boardgame. Its rules could have been a little less succinct, but otherwise, the game is very well appointed. *When Darkness Comes: The Awakening* should provide no little pleasure both in terms of playing the game and in creating your own supplementary material.

--*Matthew Pook*

Savage Seas (for Exalted RPG)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing](#)



Written by **Robert J. Defendi, Dan Quackenbush, and Scott Taylor**

128 b&w pages; \$17.95

White Wolf Game Studio's epic fantasy game, *Exalted*, has a setting vast enough to challenge its larger-than-life player characters. Inhabited lands much larger than Earth's continents are surrounded by even vaster unknown realms, where the old mapmaker's slogan "Here Be Dragons" could be literally true. Much of the known world is ocean, and many adventures will involve sea voyages. *Savage Seas* provides support for players and Storytellers wanting detailed information on this aspect of *Exalted*.

High fantasy sounds as if it ought to be easy; just make things up and, if they make a good story, use them. But in fact the best work in this genre has always been informed by knowledge of the real world, such as Tolkien's historical linguistics or Eddison's Renaissance political history. Happily, *Savage Seas* follows this tradition. The nautical life this book portrays is fictional, but it's clear that the authors have learned from the real history of seafaring and shipbuilding; their brief bibliography (on pp. 6-7) reveals an impressive choice of sources.

The first chapter discusses life on shipboard, including both everyday life and extraordinary hazards such as storms, fires, pirates, and sea monsters. This chapter provides a table of organization and explains the duties of the various positions and the progress of various careers through them. Short passages on navigation and sailing are admirably lucid and well thought out; for example, the navigation section takes into account the peculiarities of navigation on a flat world (and one where compasses point to the central landmass, not to the north). The incessant drudgery and occasional brutality of seagoing life emerge vividly.

The second chapter is a guide to the construction and operation of ships. Under different names, these ships include most of the classic historic types of Earth, from the ancient Greek trireme to the Chinese junk. Hull construction techniques include both the shell-first methods of the ancient world, where the frame is added later as internal bracing, and the frame-first methods developed in medieval Europe, where the hull planks are attached to a completed frame. A dozen ship models provide for the needs of a variety of campaigns. These include two First Age warships embodying forgotten magical arts -- one of several points at which the authors are careful to make fantasy an integral part of their treatment. Some of these designs even use paddlewheels, like certain experimental Chinese ships of ca. 1000 A.D.

The third chapter discusses various types of voyagers, including merchants, navies, and pirates. Major fleets of each type are described, with short biographies of some of their leaders. The end of the chapter discusses combat, providing abstracted rules for ship-to-ship battles. The sequence of presentation is logical and covers all the important aspects of such combat, from missile fire to boarding actions; this section looks easy to use, with a good balance between technical accuracy and narrative excitement.

The fourth chapters gets into the core fantastic elements of the world: sea monsters, spirits and gods, charms used at sea, and magical devices. Preceding this last section is a section on nonmagical weapons, including bows, mechanical artillery, and fire weapons, with a table of combat statistics. The magical items range from cargo preservation spindles to implosion bows. The weaponry follows the common anime convention of specially gifted heroes using their own vital energy to operate the most potent artillery. The range from real weapons and creatures through real world nautical folklore to original fantasy gives this chapter a sense of solidity.

This book covers the same ground as the sections of *GURPS Low-Tech* that discuss navigation and shipbuilding. Having done most of the research for those sections personally, I was ready to cast a critical eye on a competing treatment. But, in fact, what I found was every bit as well-researched, and covers a range of topics for which *GURPS Low-Tech* had too little room. The style of presentation, as is usual for White Wolf, is one that wears its erudition lightly, emphasizing story elements and campaign possibilities; but all the technical details are there, supporting the surface of fantastic narrative with a skeleton of vivid realism. Anyone wanting to run nautical adventures in a historical or historical fantasy campaign would find this book an invaluable source.

--*William H. Stoddard*

Absent Players, Drooling Heroes

As you read this, I may well be in the magical happy land of frou-frou butterflies and cotton candy smokestacks . . . or at least Atlanta. Yes, it's that time of year again when I make it to the only convention that's geographically and financially viable to me: [DragonCon](#). Fortunately it's a wonderful convention for someone with a hummingbird-esque post-*Sesame Street* attention span like myself; when I get tired of hanging out with the gaming folks, I can lurk around the comic tables, only to move on to stalking fantasy/sci-fi celebrities.

Now, this is my first year that I'll be at this con as an honest-to-goodness guest; my first year I was a guest of a guest (a fine gent by the name of Steve Jackson), and last year the stars didn't align so I needed to pay my own way in. So it will be interesting to see if I'll still be subject to the "badge shrug-off." See, my first year there I had a "guest" badge, and I should have one again this year. Now, when you walk around a convention in such a badge . . . well, it draws attention to yourself. That's why they're letting you in for free, after all; it's neat to wander around and see people who might be someone you want to meet. The key being "might," of course; most people in the fantasy, sci-fi, and comic world couldn't care less who I am. Heck, most people in the gaming world couldn't care less who I am. (Aw, let's crank up the honesty to 11; most people who read *Pyramid* couldn't care less who I am.)

Which results in the "badge shrug-off": the tendency of conventioners to come up, squint to look at the badge (they're small!), realize you are of no interest to them, and shrug off to go look at other people. Now, I'm sure if my name were, y'know, Lucy Lawless or something, I'd face this much less. (I'd also worry more about my goatee.) But I'm not. Thus, after so much casual rejection . . . well, I feel like I'm in middle school all over again. But I'll be having a blast, so it doesn't matter.

So, like I said, the social scientist within me is quite interested to see how often it happens again. And if you happened to be at DragonCon, take a look for me . . . only to shrug and wander off.

* * *

Well, we've got the random digression out of the way, so I can now pretend I'm writing about something that *really* interests you.

I'm lucky enough to be part of two gaming groups that currently meet on alternate Saturdays. And I like to believe I'm a pretty good player; among my other contributions, I have a habit of actually showing up to game. Having said that, I am now missing two sessions of one campaign, both because I'm out of town.

Unfortunately, my character tends to be pretty important, holding positions of prominence and power in the game. And I need to make arrangements so that my (and possibly my character's) absence is as undisruptive as possible. So the question arises: What happens when a player doesn't show up?

Well, there are a number of options, ranging from the obvious to the not-so-obvious.

Game off! The game is canceled that session. This is probably much more likely with a small gaming group than a larger one; if you only have a GM and two players, there isn't much point in playing if one of them doesn't show up. On the other hand, if there are eight players, then the odds of *someone* not showing up each week are pretty good (especially in the post-college maelstrom of work/relationships/kids/lawns). Although canceling the game if someone can't attend is logically simple and quite effective -- the plot will continue exactly as planned when all can attend -- it can also lead to a bad habit of non-games; once too many sessions get cancelled, you no longer have a campaign . . . you have memories.

"Vlad's not in right now, but if you leave your name . . ." -- One of the most logical and easily workable solutions is to "write" the character out of the game for the session. Pressing business in other towns, and waiting in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles can all serve to keep a character off-stage for a week. This is also a good a time to justify an absence by dusting off all those Dependants, Allies, Enemies, and the like; maybe Aunt Agnes needs

someone to talk to her plants for the weekend. Maybe the Azure Hand Clan is hot on the hero's tail, and he needs to hide to avoid them. Maybe the Azure Hand Clan has figured out how to control Aunt Agnes' mutant talking plants, making for a *loooong* weekend for the hero. Regardless, the character definitely won't be around to help with anything. Of course, this technique has its problems; probably foremost is that it only works if the party starts out each adventure in "downtime"; if they're in the middle of a dungeon, it's a lot more difficult to justify one hero ducking out for afternoon tea with the Prime Minister.

There, but drooling. -- So what do you do when you *are* in the middle of a dungeon? In our gaming groups we used to refer to any occurrence of absent players but present characters as "there, but drooling"; the PC is still part of the party, but will be off-camera as much as humanly possible . . . should the camera ever *need* to pan to the character for some reason, the GM would exert the least amount of effort necessary to fulfill that need, then pan off. ("You rescue Archbishop Remus from the bottom of the dungeon, who goes up to Brother Lightheart. 'I shall see you at church on Sunday?' the Archbishop asks. Lightheart nods, and goes back to praying.") Characters who are "drooling" will be uninspiringly ineffective in combat (unless directed by another character), will not have any useful contributions to planning sessions, and so on. Sure, he'll be able to cast those healing spells if he's the only one with those powers, but he won't think of that himself this week.

This technique does stretch disbelief fair bit; *why* is the usually chatty pilot so silent this week, or the normally brilliant combat tactician so staid? But it also works surprisingly well in-game; the other players know why that character is barely there, and the character is still around for those essential abilities. Plus the potential for drooling silliness gives players an incentive to show up to game. ("Your character met the archbishop." "Really?!?" "Yeah. You said, 'Hi.'") This method can also be problematic because it introduces an instance where the character has been present for scenes that the player has not, requiring out-of-game explanation to the player about what he missed. (It's one thing to explain in-game what an out-of-town character missed; it's another to bring the *player* up to speed, wasting game time.)

There, but GM-controlled -- This is a more generous form of "There, but drooling." It has the GM trying to play the missing PC in the character's best interests. This requires a great deal more work on the GM's part, who will also require caution to separate GM knowledge from character knowledge; the other players may also object when, in essence, a GM-controlled character wades thigh-high into battle or social scenes, stealing the other present player's thunder. Although this method isn't terribly recommended, there may be some instances where this method can be useful (for example, if the missing player normally plays a very weak character, such that acting capably still won't interfere with the other player's fun).

"Vlad's not here right now, but he left this letter . . ." -- If a character is vitally important to the game, then it might be possible for the player and GM to work together to justify his absence . . . especially if everyone knows ahead of time the player won't be there. Thus if the GM may say that the missing hero is off investigating another aspect of the adventure, giving the GM a chance to drop clues or plot advancers -- perhaps in the form of notes or brief phone messages -- to the other players. This is a very useful technique which can avoid needing to explain *why* the sheriff isn't present to deal with a threat to the town; he *is* there . . . he's just tackling the problem from another angle.

"The role of Vlad will be played by . . ." -- If the players work it out ahead of time, it may well be possible for another *player* to take control of a missing character. If trying this technique, players should choose a designated "alternate", who will play the missing player's character in addition to his own. Players would then be responsible for ensuring their alternate has current character sheets for his hero, and it would fall to the alternate to fill in the missing player as to what his character did during the session. This method works pretty well; it takes the burden off the GM of running another character, and helps the gaming group retain the cohesion of the party. However, it *does* mean the players need to trust each other, and can lead to some awkward moments. ("Sorry, man . . . Brother Lightheart is dead; he honestly thought it was in the party's best interests to try to intimidate the ancient dragon. But he *did* give Flibo Fuzzankles his Ring of Regeneration right before he tried that . . .")

If it seems that the group will be choosing any option other than canceling the game, it may be worthwhile for the GM to create a form for each player to determine what he wants to happen to his characters:



- If you aren't here, list five things your character may be doing so that he'll be away from the party (helping relatives, going out of town, etc.)
- Do you mind the GM using your missing character to feed the other players clues/information?
- Do you have a designated alternate player? If so, who?
- If it falls to the GM to control your character, choose a level of utility/risk you want your character to act:

5 -- Character will be as useful as possible to the party, including taking maximum risks for it

4 -- Character will be very useful to the party, taking a fair bit of risk

3 -- Character will be somewhat useful to the party, taking some risk

2 -- Character will be mildly useful to the party, taking the slightest of risks

1 -- Character will be all but entirely useless, taking almost no risks

. . . and so on.

Although even the best players will be absent from game every now and then, it doesn't need to be disruptive . . . if you take the time to work out ahead of time what will happen in those instances. As in most things, information is king; telling the group a month in advance when you won't be there will give everyone more options than simply not showing up to game.

Of course, this is assuming that you aren't missing game because you're hiding from the Azure Hand Clan as the guest of a Con.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Midnight on Dagger Alley**, inside cover panel.*

(Four stars) "VENERATED PATRIARCH: Magicians sometimes live to great old age. (This probably comes from being able to return from the dead.) Whatever the reason, this character has accumulated vast skill and power over decades or centuries."

Character Communications

by Giles Schildt

Many campaigns have some kind of "magical" secure communication between characters, at least as long as the *players* were all sitting in the same room. Examining how these adventurers are able to communicate may seem like an arcane detail unless you are playing an espionage campaign; however, in the real world one must be careful where, when, and *how* things are said. Significant depth and realism can be added by paying attention to when the PCs could overhear or be overheard and when their communications could be intercepted or altered. In many espionage campaigns the most interesting adventure opportunities are thrown away with a single roll against Cryptanalysis; just a little knowledge of communication security can really expand those campaigns.

Characters engaging in questionable kinds of activities frequently have to worry about their ability to communicate, keeping the contents of their messages secret, determining the authenticity of messages they receive, and sometimes keeping the fact that they are communicating at *all* a secret. If cell phone subscriptions are any indication, most people are familiar with the ability to communicate; the rest of this article, then, will discuss the three concepts that people who aren't spies or security professionals in "real life" may be less aware of, including some rules ideas for **GURPS**.

Message Content Secrecy

Keeping the content of a message secret is normally handled by encrypting it. Simply put, encryption is the process of altering a message to make it unreadable. To understand your message, the recipient must know how to reverse the encoding process, or decrypt the message. Therefore encryption is a process of protecting big secrets with little secrets. If an enemy learns the little secret (usually a "key") he can use it to find all the big secrets (the messages encrypted with that key).

The encoding process can be anything from a simple substitution that can be worked out in someone's head to a complex series of mathematical formulas that require the most powerful computers available. The strongest ciphers can't always be used because the recipient may not have a secure computer available to decode the message, but if the data has an expiration date the cipher only has to protect it that long; decrypting the orders to attack Pearl Harbor on December 8th wouldn't have helped anyone. Keep in mind that some data may have multiple expiration dates. Just because the troops will move within a week doesn't mean an enemy wouldn't be happy to find out who the spy that sent the report was any time during the war.

Before powerful digital computers, many codes required specialized equipment to decode (such as the German Enigma device of WWII) and significant resources to crack. Unfortunately, if an enemy steals a mechanical decoding device, all codes based on it are compromised. Specialized cryptographic processors remain common in high security environments because they are harder to tamper with than general-purpose computers. In electronic devices the keys can be changed, so stealing a dedicated device doesn't compromise similar model's codes. Some will even erase their keys when they detect their case is opened -- or even drilled through. With modern computers, the encryption and decryption processes are usually fast enough the time required can be ignored in game terms. The encryption process is often faster than the disk or network the data is coming from, but if the computer is multi-tasking treat each encryption or decryption process as a complexity one program.¹

How secret is an encrypted message? Today, most ciphers that can be computed by hand (or created in an hour with a skill roll) can be broken quickly with a common desktop computer. A good encryption algorithm, one developed and tested by a large team of professional cryptanalysts over a period of years, will be many orders of magnitude harder to break than it is to decode. Calculating exactly how hard it is to break a particular code is tricky², but a good encryption process should take trillions of years to crack with a million supercomputers working together. In light of predictions the sun will go nova in the next several billion years this may seem excessive, but it is necessary because computer technology advances quickly; today's supercomputer is tomorrow's doorstop. A computer specifically

designed to crack codes is also more efficient. The best civilian encryption algorithm in 1975 looked impressively hard to break when it was introduced. In 1997 an enterprising organization started breaking keys by collecting unused computer power volunteered over the web. One attempt in 1999 was successful in only 22 hours, with a specialized cracking device designed and built for a mere \$250,000 testing half as many keys as the 10,000 computers donating time via the web. There are rumors the NSA built specialized computers for \$50,000 apiece that could crack it in 3-15 minutes per key.

The weak point of most encryption systems is the secrecy of the key. Individuals who know it can be blackmailed, bought, or tortured. A traitor in the organization may have legitimate access to several encryption keys. People with poor memories may write them on their calendars or on notes left under their keyboard; keys might be intercepted while being sent to remote users; some keys are based on passwords that are easy to guess; the list goes on. One day during World War II the allies intercepted six German messages that were encrypted with the key "AAA" . . . and another four with the similarly lazy key "BBB." The more work a security system imposes on users, the more likely they are to take shortcuts, such as leaving their computer logged in at lunch or even at night. Most importantly, nearly all general-purpose computers have security vulnerabilities that can be exploited to gain direct access to documents after a legitimate user has decrypted them, sometimes even remotely over a network. If the story can be believed, a NSA cryptanalyst was once asked if they could break the government sponsored Data Encryption Standard (DES). The expert replied that in the real world, cryptographic systems and practices were so weak they never needed to attack the actual cipher. This is good news for gamers; "rubber-hose cryptography" (as it is sometimes called) is much more fun to roleplay than watching a computer run a mathematical attack.

Even if agents can't steal the key, mathematical attacks can be greatly aided by other information. Just knowing it has a standard email header or includes certain syntax elements is valuable. During WWII many German messages were broken by looking for the names and titles of German officers or other subjects analysts expected the message to concern. At times the Allies would even aid their cryptanalysts with attacks designed to generate encrypted enemy radio messages with predictable contents. Mathematical attacks against the best modern cryptographic algorithms are practically impossible without that kind of intelligence, and extremely difficult even with it.

Some encryption systems have other vulnerabilities. The descriptions of four simplified categories of common encryption methods below are far from complete. They focus on the types of attacks that can give rise to adventuring opportunities and some of the obstacles would be code breakers may face. For more information on cryptography, see the reading list at the end of this article.

Nearly all cryptography prior to digital computers fell into the broad category of simple substitution and transposition codes. As their name implies, they involve either replacing letters or words with a corresponding code symbol, rearranging the order of symbols, or both. The electro-mechanical coding devices of World War II produced the most complex and secure codes of this type. Their main weakness is that security depends on the secrecy of both the algorithm and key. While keys might be short enough to remember and are easy to change, algorithms usually have to be written down or built into a machine, and thus are more vulnerable to theft. A traitor revealing the encoding process compromises many codes even when other agents' keys are safe. Algorithms are also hard to change. Everyone has to learn the new process and the coding machine's design has to be modified. Today all codes of this type are vulnerable to expeditious computer attacks, but may be used by people who don't know any better. Competent military and espionage organizations still use temporary substitution codes for information that expires very quickly because some specialized substitution codes can be rapidly encoded in one's head.

Public key cryptography is one way to resolve the key interception issue. In a public key system a person who wants to receive messages creates two keys, one public and one private. The public key is used to encrypt messages that can only be decrypted with a private key. Digital signatures are a specialized public key system, essentially one run in reverse where the private key encrypts the message and the public key decrypts it. Some users minimize public key use and only distribute keys for "traditional" symmetric key cryptography with their public key system because public keys require more computing power and are by definition vulnerable to a powerful cryptographic attack called the adaptive chosen text attack.³ These algorithms must be designed to remain secure when a rival cryptanalyst knows the algorithm, public key, and even the contents of some messages. In a well-designed system the only mathematical vulnerability is to brute force the private key, which is generally impractical, but there are social attacks. If you can

trick someone into encoding a message with your public key instead of their intended recipient's, you will be able to read their message and even alter it and re-encrypt it using their intended recipient's real key. These keys are generally distributed as computer files, so inattentive users may not notice when they are replaced. Of course, those same inattentive users are not likely to notice an agent stealing the unencrypted information off their hard drive, either.

As its name implies, in symmetric key cryptography both the encoding and decoding processes use the same key. Like public key cryptography, a well-designed implementation's only vulnerability is the key. To minimize risks each key is usually only known by a few people, changed frequently, zealously guarded, or all three. For example, when creating ATM communication keys, at least two bank officers each generate building blocks for a key which are mathematically combined inside each secure cryptographic processor. When implemented correctly, the key never exists outside the secure processors and no individual bank officer even has information that would be useful to someone attempting to break the key; only combining all the building blocks provides any information about the final key. Most organizations will have numerous keys which must each be broken separately, or even create a new key for each message, called a session key. The real score there is cracking the mechanism used to distribute session keys, something which is always *very* secure. It is worth noting that some powerful cryptographic algorithms degenerate into simple substitution codes when they are improperly implemented. If agents can discover weaknesses in the implementation a mathematical attack may become practical. No major espionage organization would ever make such a mistake, but corporations that don't understand cryptography do.

One cryptographic system can be computed by hand and is immune to normal cryptanalytic attacks. It's called a "one-time pad." Effectively it's a new code for each letter of the message being sent, which is both its strength and its greatest drawback. A one-time pad requires the distribution of a pair of special codebooks or "pads" that are as large as all the messages both the sender and receiver intend to send. If one person runs out of pages they can't send any messages until they get a new pad. For large message volumes this is a logistical nightmare, and pads are vulnerable to covert copying if they aren't distributed carefully. The good news is that the only way to break this code is to steal and copy a pad from either the sender or recipient. Proper management of these pads (including immediate destruction of the used pages) can make that very difficult. Historically some spies solved the distribution problem by using published books as keys (specifying a new page number in each message to avoid re-use) but with fast digital computers a cryptanalyst could use linguistic patterns to break this without needing the book. Real random numbers are needed for the pads. The pseudo-random numbers computers make will not work either; a cryptanalyst who knows enough about the target's computer can duplicate the series.

Message Authenticity

Verifying a message's authenticity is something people do every day, even if they don't think about it. For example, when speaking on the phone you recognize someone's voice, pronunciation habits, and speaking style. You also analyze their vocabulary, the ideas they express, and the knowledge they appear to possess, to see if these are consistent with your knowledge of the speaker. One reason you may find yourself saying "Dave just doesn't seem like himself today," is that one or more of the "mechanisms" you use to authenticate Dave's communication "failed," or indicated that it wasn't really Dave.

In *GURPS*, impersonation is handled with the Acting (p. B62) and Disguise (p. B65) skills. When the impersonator is trying to convey information, persuade someone to take action, or even hold a meaningful conversation (as opposed to simply establishing an alibi) additional Quick Contests of Intelligence or Skills related to the subject matter would be appropriate. Victims who know the person being impersonated will always have an advantage, as much as +10 depending on the thoroughness of the actor's research (or lack thereof) and how well the victim knows the person being impersonated. Alternatively, these situations could be roleplayed leaving the player to scramble for names of the victim's children and similar details. A tie might leave the victim with a vague feeling that "so-and-so is not himself today." How suspicious the victim becomes depends on many factors. This vague unease regarding a discussion of the weather in a public location probably won't be given a second thought, but the same conversation in even a semi-secure location (say a law firm's offices, or some accounting departments) could arouse suspicion, and a spy that is uncomfortable with a message vital to national security could spend considerable resources researching the source of the message. He could hire the players to assist the investigation, or consider them suspects. That could even be the

central plot of an espionage campaign.

Written communications cannot benefit from voice or visual authentication techniques, so today even non-spies routinely authenticate important written documents, such as contracts, by notarizing papers or digitally signing electronic documents. Writing style analysis is not terribly consistent or exact. The Unabomber was identified in part by his writing style, but after 500 years writing style analysts are still arguing about the authorship of Shakespeare's plays. In game terms, as long as the forger can stick to the victim's approximate sentence complexity and vocabulary they are likely to fool everyone. Use the process described in the basic set for Forgery (p. B65) but substitute the Writing skill (p. B48). The "sample to copy" could be almost any sample of the target's writing, although his scientific publications may be written quite differently than his love letters. Handwritten or signed letters would require the more difficult of the Forgery or Writing rolls.

Encrypted communications almost always include some kind of authentication. It could be built into the encryption process, an added digital signature, a secret (and inconspicuous) protocol used to guard against key theft, or all three.

For historic campaigns, in the days before most nobles could write, designs imprinted in wax often served as message authentication. These were typically made with signet rings, so it might be possible to "borrow" a careless person's signature, and forgery is possible by making a copy of the ring. Of course, when a noble can't read, subverting their scribe will suffice.

The truly paranoid may even use authentication techniques for verbal communication. The secret handshake is a weak form of this. Physical tokens can be used when meeting in person, but they are vulnerable to theft. In the future, discreet and portable fingerprint or retina scanners may be used. When it really matters today, or when communications must take place over insecure phone or radio channels, a challenge response mechanism which will not be apparent to an observer is used. For example, when Harry uses the word "falcon" in an otherwise innocuous sentence, Jake would respond with the countersign "vehicle" in a sentence.⁴ This is, of course, only as secure as the method used to distribute signs and countersigns, but can be useful when dealing with a group of people who may not know each other well but have a trusted central authority to distribute authentication tokens. These signs and countersigns are always changing, and compromising an organization's authentication scheme should be the focus of several adventures; grownups only use these when establishing identity *matters*. Even a single recognition code is adventure seed material, and could be an interesting alternative to "you all meet in a bar." . . . as the dying woman's blood soaks your clothes she hands you a disk and describes a man wearing a blue jacket who will have an 8:00 reservation at Kahill's under the name Pete tomorrow night. He will start a conversation about the musical *Les Miserables* and will expect you to talk about the burgundy dress you saw on sale at Macy's . . . and thus your intrepid librarian has been unexpectedly thrust into the world of espionage.

Concealed Communications

The best way to keep secrets is to conceal the existence of the message. In an age of cheap digital computing, transmission secrecy and one-time pads are the only hope a person encoding by hand has. Sometimes the stakes are higher; if the mob finds out their enforcer Vinny has been talking to the police, they are likely to kill him before asking what he said. This is where the real spy stuff like steganography and dead drops come into play.

A dead drop is leaving a message at a designated place and time which a recipient knows to look for. It has the advantage that no one will see the sender and the recipient together and, if it is done carefully, will not even be noticed by anyone observing the sender or recipient. If the message is also encoded steganographically, it can be left in a very public place, like a web site or physical bulletin board. If a trusted third party arranges the drop sites, the sender need not even know who his recipient is and vice versa. The major drawback is having to wait until your next scheduled drop to send a message.

Steganography is the process of embedding a secret message inside an innocent looking one. Invisible inks are an ancient technique, but chemical engineering presents new opportunities. Many computer document formats can be padded with secret data in discreet ways. Altering the least significant bits of a digital image is nearly undetectable if

your adversary doesn't have the original picture. Even features in a painting or the arrangement of printed words can be used to convey secret information.

Whether or not any of these arouse suspicion depends on how much secret information they are trying to convey in each innocuous message and the creator's appropriate skill. For example, to pad an electronic document in *GURPS*, use Computer Operation (p. B58) if user-friendly applications⁵ are available or Computer Programming (p. B60) to do it by hand. Using an application is a double-edged sword; poorly programmed tools may leave a "signature" potential adversaries could identify to spot secret messages. The final product's quality is also as dependent on the programmer's skill as the operator's choice of files to conceal the message. Good tools could provide a bonus while poor tools have a penalty. If the quality of a tool is unknown (for example, it was downloaded from the Internet) apply a bonus/penalty of 1d-5 to the operators roll. The GM may assess a bonus or penalty for particularly good or bad methods and should roll for the player since the document's creator will never know how closely his work will be inspected. At the GM's option, a Steganography skill (Mental/Hard, Defaults to IQ-6 or Cryptanalysis-2) can be introduced, with each attempt requiring the harder roll of Steganography or the skill appropriate to the media the message is hidden in. Steganography could also be introduced as a Cryptanalysis (p.CII56 or SO54) specialty.

Concealing secret information of up to 5% of the original document's size is feasible in many types of uncompressed files. Some file formats have less "wasted" space steganographic messages can inhabit, some have more, but constantly emailing 24-bit bitmaps is suspicious. Most compressed file formats are not suitable for significant padding, but can safely compress files that contain secret messages; however, some compression formats (like the JPEG image format) will destroy or mangle secret data in files they compress. Add one to the steganographer's skill for each 1% the secret message is smaller than 5% of the original file size subtract 2 for each 1% larger. On a failure a person other than the intended recipient who sees the document will notice the concealed message. A letter sealed in an envelope would have to be opened before its hidden message could be discovered, but a file "dead dropped" on a web site could be noticed by a reporter for the evening news. If an adversary is actively monitoring communications, resolve as a Quick Contest of Skills. Any knowledge about the messages or how they are encoded is a tremendous advantage for the censors; which is a perfect opportunity for breaking-and-entering steganography. Most steganographically hidden messages are also encrypted to minimize the consequences of their discovery. The steganographer's cover would be blown, but the message contents would remain safe.

Gestures or code words can be assigned meanings similar to those discussed for authentication, but this system has serious limitations. All the meanings must be agreed to in advance, so this system can only communicate anticipated messages. Surprising discoveries and unexpected twists may leave the sender in a tight spot, like a multiple-choice question with no right answer. The process of distributing the secret meanings can be cumbersome, difficult to disguise, and susceptible to interception. Furthermore, a traitor can compromise this system easily. In spite of these limitations, it can still be useful in a few situations outside major league baseball.

Modern Communication Secrecy

Today's public communication networks are notable for their lack of security. Everyone knows CB radio transmissions are public, but some are surprised to learn that their cell and wireless phone transmissions are just as vulnerable. Scanners available for as little as \$99 will pick up local wireless and cell calls, although you may have to spend more for a scanner that will intercept 900MHz wireless or digital cell phones. "Anonymous" postings to Internet message groups aren't very anonymous if someone at the poster's ISP or company IT department wants to find out who he is. On some computer networks, a system administrator can read any user's email as easily as he reads his own. Assume for game purposes that any computer administrator can read any unencrypted data passing through his network if he wants to. Most electronic messages are not encrypted, so anyone with a computer on the right part of the network could intercept them if they know how.

Some companies have policies of routinely monitoring employee phone calls and email. These companies' security officers may read employee email with or without probable cause of wrongdoing. Some law enforcement Internet data collection devices (such as FBI's Carnivore) log all traffic through an ISPs server, not just the user they have a warrant to monitor.⁶ Law enforcement agencies need a court order to tap private phones, but a warrant is really only necessary

to use information in court. If the right (or wrong) person can be subverted, clandestine use could be made of secrets gleaned with law enforcement tools but without legal authorization. Enemies in those organizations should not be taken lightly.

Psionic and Magic Communications

Magical communications could be "magically secure" or detectable to anyone with the right "equipment" like radio transmissions are. Few guidelines are presented in *GURPS Magic* and *Grimoire*, and of course the GM can always alter these to suit his campaign. Even within those guidelines there is plenty of room to maneuver; perhaps anyone in the world (or the nearest 12 planes of existence) can see your Telepathy channel and attempt to eavesdrop at -4; or maybe they need to cast analyze magic on a current participant first. If telepathy can be attacked remotely a world where magic or psi is common may have thousands of active links, finding the one you want to tap (or join!) might take a special spell.

Secure versions of communication spells or psionic skills may be available. Various versions could even have different levels of encryption, which at the GM's option could be broken mathematically by any listener or might require some kind of magical "cryptanalysis" spell. Perhaps each version of the spell functions as its own encryption key, so if anyone else learns Raphael's secure spell he can listen in when he uses it. Particularly secretive (and difficult) spells could even be hard to detect with Analyze Magic or similar spells. In a magical campaign with mixed loyalties there could be great demand for spells that block all magical communication. An area spell that detects any casting or operation of communication spells could be invaluable to fantasy counter-espionage agents. Magic drastically changes any campaign with a cloak and dagger feel, particularly if civil rights laws (or their absence) allow wanton mind reading by the secret police.

Gaming Implications

Depending on the scenario and interests of the players, the extra realism in this article can either enhance the game's depth or reduce its playability. Explaining how characters are sending messages *every time* they aren't in the same room can become tedious, and adversaries constantly intercepting messages can be frustrating. On the other hand, if characters are consistently acting on information their *players* communicated, it's certainly fair to assume their enemies can tap that extra-universal telepathy, or whatever it is.

If a group thrives on detailed planning, figuring out how to pass messages under their enemies' noses is a challenge they are likely to enjoy. They will certainly relish exploiting any weakness in their adversaries' communication, and someone turning the tables could keep them on their toes. Heroes who need a little help fingering the bad guy might happen to notice one of his agent's dead drops, or discover a rashly discarded encryption key or recognition code. Groups that thrive on party strife can always use another excuse not to trust anyone, and may want to use one-time pads for their notes to the GM. Most importantly, intercepted or forged messages are excellent sources of adventure seeds for almost any campaign.

Notes

¹ For staunch realists, IBM claims a throughput of up to 15.3MB/s DES (Data Encryption Standard, also known as ISO encryption standard DEA-1) for the 4758 cryptographic card in their description a "486-class" processor. Triple DES is one-third as fast, but much of its overhead is due to backward compatibility with older DES hardware. In *GURPS*, a 486 would be a late TL7 personal computer, at the high end of complexity 1. For simplicity, assume each complexity one process will encrypt or decrypt 10 megabytes per second, if it can get the data that quickly. A normal 486 would be lucky to get information from its own hard drive at 1MB/s.

² Nominally, one might expect a 128-bit encryption algorithm to be about 10^{38} times harder to break than to decode, but many variables affect this. In practice, few or no ciphers are perfect, so a cryptanalyst may be able to take shortcuts the encrypting computer can't. An increase in the amount of data encoded and patterns in the data may make

the cipher easier to break. An attacker with no idea what the original message looks like will be at a greater disadvantage. Future encryption research may provide new shortcuts . . . and so on.

³ In an adaptive chosen text attack, the analyst can choose a specific piece of plain text, have it encrypted with the target's key, analyze the results, then choose a new piece of text to encrypt and repeat the process. This is much faster than trying to recover the key and plain text from an intercepted message.

⁴ The countersign should be an unrelated word; for example, the countersign for "falcon" should not be "bird", "fast", "hunter", or any other word that a person who doesn't know the sign would be likely to use in the next sentence by way of simply continuing the conversation. Sloppy countersign creation can start adventures with the town drunk being mistaken for a FBI mole.

⁵ Leaving the icon on your desktop is not recommended. Possession of steganography applications may be suspicious, and even illegal in some campaign worlds, with a Legality Class 3 or 4 depending on its capabilities.

⁶ Pending congressional hearings may change this process.

Further Reading

- Bruce Schneier, *Applied Cryptography: Protocols, Algorithms, and Source Code in C*, 2nd Ed. Wiley, 1996. (Excellent information on modern cryptographic methods.)
- Rudolf Kippenhahn, *Code Breaking: A History and Explanation*. Overlook Press, 1999. (Very good information on steganography and historic code use. Originally published under the title *Verschlüsselte Botschaften* in Germany.)
- David Kahn, *The Codebreakers*. Macmillan, 1967 (A historic work from an American perspective)
- Bruce Norman, *Secret Warfare: The Battle of Codes and Ciphers*. David & Charles Ltd., 1973 (Another historic piece, this one from a British perspective)
- http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~fapp2/steganography/image_downgrading/ (Good example of a steganographically encoded image)
- <http://www-3.ibm.com/security/encryptocards/> (Specs for a modern secure cryptographic co-processor.)
- <http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~rnc1/descrack> (Information on attempting to crack that secure cryptographic co-processor.)

Heresy!

Beware: It Can Happen In Any Campaign

by Michele Armellini

What is a Heresy?

Heresy is a deviation from the rule. It is a belief that runs contrary to the traditionally accepted ideas and teachings: therefore, it has the potential of shaking the very foundations of the prevalent philosophy or religion, conventional way of life, or common views about the universe. So, it is possibly the most destabilizing phenomenon that can take place in any given society.

Historically, heresies have been religious affairs -- but not always. Freethinkers and scientists were often treated as heretics: Socrates, Galileo. Political innovators who slug it out with a monolithic system might also be classed as heretics: Paine, Bakunin. Soviet dissidents were political heretics, and though they did not burn on the stake, they were sent to bedlams for their sins. Today, Falun Gong members are considered heretics, even though the authorities persecuting them are not religious ones. Tomorrow, who knows what will be against the accepted wisdom?

Heresy can happen anywhere, and it will have all sorts of far-reaching consequences. By its nature, it potentially concerns anyone, from kings to serfs -- including any kind of brave adventurers. It can serve as a gameworld backdrop, as an adventure hook, or as the ultimate mission of a playing characters' party. The heroes can be believers or adversaries, enforcers or negotiators, they can get involved unwillingly, they can be forced to take sides, or they might just try to get on with their business while everyone else is getting mad about religion.

Heresies Everywhere

While any game world may have its own heresy, here are a few examples, with adventure seeds. Each is thought out for a specific setting -- but with minimum effort, many can also be adapted to other game worlds, especially Fantasy ones. The relevant *GURPS* sourcebooks come in handy, but are not required.

Ancient Greece. It's 390 BC and the Gods are dead, or so thinks the new fashionable philosopher, Aristodemos. Socrates was sentenced to death for far less just a few years ago, and Aristodemos has just been summoned to his trial; but he feels no compunction about disobeying the laws. Officially, he's in exile; but everybody in Athens knows he's in hiding, at times in the seedier parts of the Piraeus, at times as guest of wealthy friends who also offer him security.

The authorities' efforts are half-hearted, but they'd be grateful if somebody informed them of his whereabouts. Since he's squandering the family assets, his father-in-law would also like a quiet word with him; so do the priests of Zeus. And of course there are scores of young men, anxious to find him and be seduced by his flashy rhetoric. The adventurers could be part of, or employed by any of the interested parties, or by more than one!

Imperial Rome. The latest rumor about those Christians is that one of their leaders decided they can now burn incense to the Emperor! Knowledgeable senators add that there would be a significant *quid pro quo*, however: a tit for tat that would include unprecedented privileges for a religion that is now dangerously widespread in Rome. Of course the whole thing might be a sham.

The heroes might be Imperial negotiators on a secret mission, or their escorts; members of a worldly, power-hungry heretical group out to become the official Imperial Church; hard-line Christians out to prevent this diabolical pact, possibly not by violence but by undermining the credibility of the heretics. Since it's 120 AD, this deal is happening much too early, so time-traveling or world-hopping agents may want to block this major aberration.

Byzantium. If you believe your preferred saint's icon is sacred in itself, if you go on pilgrimage to a distant monastery just to see an allegedly miraculous icon of the saint, then are you just devout to the saint, or are you worshipping the icons *themselves*? If the latter, this is idolatry, and the only solution is iconoclasm: the destruction of the idolized images. Is this the Church's position? Not at all; the Pope and most Bishops are against iconoclasm . . . this is *the Emperor's* position. Which is not surprising, because in this way he can curb the excessive power of the Church, and seize the lands and riches of wealthy monasteries.

It's 820 AD, and icon-making monks have had their hands burned, while priceless artworks are being destroyed every month. The military and a tame Patriarch back the Emperor, but his subjects are mostly with the Church, and the Byzantine domains in Italy are shakier than ever -- something the Arabs have noticed. Interesting roles: monks on the run; icon smugglers; assassins or spies; retainers of Imperial or Papal envoys trying to sort out the mess; barbarian mercenaries who are only nominally Christian and don't understand what the fuss is about. This is a historical scenario.

Middle Ages. 1306 AD. "We are living like the apostles did; we prefer poverty to wealth, like St. Francis did; we follow Fra' Dolcino, a holy man and a prophet; we are good Christians. So why does the Bishop of Novara hunt us like rabid dogs?" Probably because he's rich, not poor; because they -- the so-called "apostolics" -- obey nobody, neither the Church nor the lay authorities; and because, in their hurry to see their leader's apocalyptic prophecies come true, they are ravaging his lands and killing wealthy people. The heroes in this historically accurate situation might be Dolcino's followers, or men-at-arms serving the Bishop, who judge the heretics by the villages they pillage. They might be lofty knights who are suddenly surrounded by an armed mob, and enjoined to convert . . . and to throw their riches in the river! After this, they are forced to follow Dolcino, just as the Bishop's militias are tightening their noose around his doomed rabble. Finally, Franciscan monks would be in an interesting quandary when heretic survivors, who also are devout to St. Francis, knock at their monastery's door.

Fantasy/Yrth (*GURPS Fantasy*, p. 80). These days, Balik al-Firuz is more confident than ever that Allah smiles on his mission: cleansing Islam's lands of the abominable magic-users. A hedge witch prisoner escaped, but she was quite easily captured by the tribesmen of the al-Hasakahi clan. After thoroughly questioning the witch, it turned out that many of the tribesmen were impervious to her magic, possibly because they marry within the clan, thus making a peculiar feature (Magical Resistance) more common. That's why they are suitable bodyguards for Balik, and ideal wizard-hunting assassins, too.

The PCs might be tribesmen, more or less willing for indoctrination and training; Balikites, possibly jealous of these new favorites; spies or bounty-hunters, targeting Balik; and even friends of the witch, out for revenge.

Swashbucklers. The Jesuits are about to be thrown out of Portugal, and not just because they are too powerful. They are adamant that Christians cannot own Christians as slaves -- a point that would ruin the economy of the Portuguese South-American colony, and let the local Jesuit missions flourish. In those missions, converted natives work as hard as in the plantations, but by their *free* choice. The Pope is fed up with the conspiratorial Jesuits and under enormous pressure by European kings; he's likely to withdraw his support to the Society and even to excommunicate some lower-ranking members. Jesuits wouldn't dare challenge the Pope openly, but their General thinks Popes change their mind -- and they die, too.

This setting is largely historical, but should the Jesuits succeed at replacing the Pope with one of their own or at establishing a theocratic almost-egalitarian state in the Amazon basin, we'd have an alternate history. This struggle is fought in Europe, from the back alleys of Lisbon to the corridors of the Vatican, with intrigues, corruption, daggers and poisons; on the seas, since the Jesuits had their own shadowy fleet, with the heretic British corsairs sure to barge in for profit; and in South America, with pitched battles around the missions and guerrilla in the deadly jungles.

Cliffhangers. 1931. Jobs, savings, and even housing went down the drain with the stock market. But not all hope is lost if we help each other. This is the simple line of Father Robert Collins, a radio preacher whose voice is described as "a spell." But that's nothing compared to meeting him in person; he can win a convert in the blink of an eye. "Father Bob's Brotherhoods" are being founded everywhere; these are utopia-like communes where anybody can be accepted, provided that he brings in what he owns and will work for the common good. The Brotherhoods are race-blind and

denomination-blind, and Father Bob, though a Catholic, is very unorthodox; his lieutenants are a black Evangelical preacher, a young Mexican nun, and a Jewish ex-hobo. The Brotherhoods seem to be doing lots of good, but the bit about surrendering one's own possessions is tricky; even assuming Father Bob and his growing organization are straight on the whole, one corrupt local leader would be a disaster. And that's not the only concern.

The adventurers could be jobless ordinary Joes who are welcomed in a Brotherhood and gradually discover strange going-ons, FBI G-men investigating on what possibly is a covert communist organization, locally-hired toughs tasked with defending a mixed Brotherhood from the KKK, freelancers working for a dying rich businessman whose only daughter has joined the movement, Cabal envoys interested in what could be a mind-controlling wizard or brain-washing psi, or Catholics informally and confidentially appointed by their Bishop to gather info about Father Bob's unorthodoxy. Note that more than one of these threads might be present . . . and what if Father Bob really means well, *but* he does meddle with people's minds?

Espionage/Special Ops. The not-too-distant future. The trouble began when the Falun Gong cult organized simultaneous, peaceful gatherings on a hundred Chinese squares, and refused to disperse. The ensuing slaughter made Tian An Men look like a small riot. Little did the Chinese authorities know that nowadays, darkness is not a cover, and that commercial satellites had their sensitive cameras trained on those bloodbaths. The Western public opinion said "enough." China lost its favored trade status, not to mention the Hague Court issuing warrants for the Chinese leadership, which -- aging and confused -- decided to strike back. Falun Gong members are hunted down, Hong Kong is under an unprecedented crackdown. Accusations have been launched about the cult's leaders being harbored in Taiwan, and missiles and landing ships are being deployed -- just as the US Navy is engaged elsewhere.

The heroes can be Western diplomats in China, exploiting their immunity to help fugitives; a media team doing their job; agents entering China on a variety of missions; undercover Chinese agents posturing as persecuted escapees; the employees of a Western businessman supporting the Falun Gong who suddenly went missing in Kowloon; or a special ops team sent to demonstrate that Taiwan is still off-limits, even when it's not patrolled by a carrier group.

Cabal/Horror. In a world where horror stories are true, the truth is too fearsome for ordinary humans to face. That's why the Cabal, and most other covenants of supernatural beings, always strive to hide the true nature of the universe from mere mortals. So, the lodge that decides to disclose that truth is heretical. It is a threat to the Cabal, and maybe to mankind as well.

The heroes can be powerful heretic hunters, out to suppress the threat. Or the heretics themselves, who know or look for the truth out there, and have their own reasons to show it to everybody, possibly through spectacular demonstrations. They may be Magi In Black (see *GURPS Cabal*, p. 41, and *GURPS Black Ops*), sent to convince mundane bystanders that "nothing special happened". Or they may be those innocent bystanders themselves!

Cyberpunk/Near Future. Neo-luddites and other movements believe that computers, the cyberspace, and AIs are the devil. On the contrary, somebody thinks they are, well, *god* . . . or soon they will be. The few, powerful members of a cult so secret it has not even a known name believe that only a genius AI with unbound powers will be able to save us from our mistakes, and their agenda is simply . . . to build god.

The PCs can share this view, or not; they might be trying to exploit the situation; or they might be unwary cyberspace workmen entangled in the fight.

Custom-Made Heresies

While the examples above might be of help, a heresy can also be custom-made for anybody's gameworld. Read on and pick.

How Dangerous?

Heresies can be roughly classified by answering the questions below. These also help in defining how malignant are

the heretical ideas.

Does the heresy undermine the establishment?

If yes, this is the most dangerous form and it will be ruthlessly crushed. The first enemy of such a heresy is of course the religious establishment; for instance, if the heretics (such as the Protestants) deem that priests are not indispensable intermediaries between the Divinity and the faithful, this makes the Church useless, and the clergy will react with all their might. But a heresy might be seen as an enemy by lay authorities, too; if the pious man pleads with the people for obeying God and not the King, the latter won't like that ("Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?", quoth Henry II). If, according to the heretics, wealth is not a sign of the gods' benevolence and money is the devil's dung, the Merchant Guilds will feel threatened. Some heresies endanger the Church's survival, by criticizing the sale of indulgences (as Martin Luther's), the Church's possessions, or (horrors!) the collection of tithes.

Sometimes the undermining effect may be subtle, and this might make it even more dangerous. For instance, a preacher might follow the tenets *too closely* . . . if the hierarchy's actual behavior is inconsistent with the official creed. This happened with Savonarola.

If the heresy does not actually threaten the establishment, it might be considered less dangerous. However, there will be hardliners in the hierarchy who believe the very existence of a heretic movement is anathema. This also depends on how intolerant the society is on the whole.

Does the heresy affect mundane, everyday life?

If the dissenters split because they think hymns should be sung without instrumental accompaniment, this makes for a basically harmless heresy. A tolerant establishment will try to overlook that. A totalitarian government or intolerant Church, of course, might take it as a threatening challenge to their rule and crush it anyway; the Russian Old Believers mainly dissented over subtle points of ritual, but churchfuls of them were burned for that. On the other hand, certain heresies do affect everyday behavior, and the more they do, the more dangerous they may be judged. If the Bogomils did indeed practice orgies and incest (in all likelihood an Inquisitor's slander), that would have been an understandable reason to stamp them out.

How close is the heresy to the accepted teachings?

Of course gross theological mistakes can't be ignored, and Arius and his followers were done in by his misjudgment about the divine nature of Christ. However, for some totalitarian churches, one step out of the line, no matter how short, is always a step into hell. For less intolerant establishments it might not be so, but a close deviation might also be judged as a more insidious attack on orthodoxy. Ignorant peasants can't be expected to distinguish right from wrong in a theological debate, but the very fact that a debate is going on might make them uncertain as to who is their true pastor.

Also, infidels sometimes are considered as people who haven't had a chance of seeing the light, so the church may well try to convert them, but not necessarily persecute them. On the other hand, believers who received the true faith and then abandoned it deserve no mercy: as it happens with apostates of Islam in Sharia-code countries this very day.

Are the heretics militant missionaries?

If they are, they'll try to spread their creed as fast as they can, which makes their heresy that more virulent. Some modern cults are doing just that. Of course, not all of them are very successful in converting large numbers to their ideas; a *successfully* proselytizing group will be considered much more of a threat.

On the contrary, some heretics or non-believers (such as Jews of the Diaspora) intentionally abstained from proselytizing, often in hopes of avoiding a crackdown. This does not always work, as Spanish Jews discovered.

Are the heretics violent?

Some heretics will be as bloodthirsty as their enemies, and they may implement the convert-or-die policy. It's either with them or against them. Evidently, the mainstream religion(s) will have an easier time demonstrating such heresies have to be wiped away.

Other groups may be completely non-violent -- such as the early Christians! Finally, some cults will employ whatever means suit best the situation, maybe avoiding blatant acts of violence but not covert ones, or resorting to intimidation, trickery and brain-washing.

Heresy and Society

Heterodoxy exists only because there is an orthodoxy. The diverse relationships between the rule and the deviation can cause interesting effects.

An intolerant society, with an established church and a rigid class system, will usually react harshly against the deviation, because adherence to the rule is considered of vital importance for the survival of the society itself. Furthermore, the upper classes hugely benefit from the strict enforcement of the rule. The more a mainstream church or a ruling class are entrenched, the more they have to lose from a change. State churches won't tolerate freedom of religion, kings can only abhor democracy, totalitarian states can't stand individual rights.

On the other hand, in tolerant societies, such as ours, the idea of heresy seems outdated. There are no rules, seemingly. We have freedom of religion, who cares if you worship the Devil? Well, we do care, if people plan to sacrifice virgins. Oh, and they can't treat their five wives as slaves . . . and that one seems no older than 14, by the way. And must they really go on chanting all night?

This example shows that rules will always exist if there is an organized society. Maybe they aren't religious rules. They may be ethical rules, even simply laws; but if there is a rule, there may be a deviation . . . and thus a heresy.

So, modern heretics are persecuted only if they break a criminal law, as in the case of the madman sacrificing virgins? Not necessarily. Until recently in tolerant France, a Muslim girl couldn't wear a head scarf when at school; today, anti-racist laws are being exploited in an effort to censor Fallaci's book about Islam and the Western civilization. Also, heretics aren't always persecuted by a state authority; in democratic Israel there are no laws against driving on Saturdays, but if you do that in the wrong neighborhood, your car will need repairs.

Also, modern tolerance applies to a small part of the world, and there are always exceptions. Desecrate the name of Allah in Nigeria and you'll get your punishment. South-American death squads killed many Catholic priests and a bishop (Romero) because of the political consequences of their ideas. In the future, maybe the heretics will find new lay tenets to break, for instance (in the *Transhuman Space* setting) intellectual property laws. Note that just breaking a social rule or a law does not automatically make a heretic. But if one *believes* the rule he breaks is wrong and he is right, if he doesn't do it occasionally and seeking personal gain, then he is a heretic. An ordinary bandit isn't a rebel, but Robin Hood was.

The Cult's Organization

Historically, a minority of heretical groups were organized like the cults of Orphic mysteries and Horror fiction, with several layers of acolytes and initiates, each layer being more knowledgeable about the cult's secrets and more powerful. Gnostics, with their emphasis on secret knowledge, apparently had such a structure. Some other sects developed it out of self-defense. Modern exploitative cults, where the leaders are actually out for the hapless followers' money, will have an "inner circle" with its own secret agenda.

On the contrary, most heresies develop like a popular, grass-roots movement. They have most or all of the following features:

- A popular, charismatic prophet, not necessarily the day-to-day leader of an organization.
- One or more active leaders taking care of practical matters: propaganda, financing, operations.
- A few locally well-known personalities acting as testimonials for the movement.
- A more or less structured body, or more often more than one smaller entities, organizing the rank-and-file.
- A core of dedicated followers.
- A much larger number of sympathizers and supporters.

A very realistic and interesting heretical movement might have a main organization, possibly having some form of hierarchy; several smaller "splinter" groups, often having more extreme views than the main body; and external sympathizers who aren't directly affiliated to any of the above, but who support either the movement as a whole or one of the groups.

The Backlash

So how will the establishment strike back? All-out religion wars, such as the one against the Hussites, are the only possibility if the heretics have their own territory and military might. During the crusade against the Albigensians, Arnaud, the papal legate, said: "Kill them all, for God knows his own!", and the entire city of Béziers, including babies, was exterminated. That total-war approach was used because a whole region had been declared heretical, and because the Pope had the full support of Northern French nobles. Also, the Albigensians were openly practicing their religion.

Things are different if the heretics are a secret group hiding among a faithful population, possibly employing systems such as masked meetings, small-cell pyramidal organizations, etc. This is a job for the Inquisition (preferred methods: torture and confessions), and in modern/future times, for those police agencies who are trained for hunting spies (among the possible methods: surveillance, infiltration).

At times, a few courageous believers didn't advertise their membership in the sect, but if questioned, they wouldn't lie. Early Christians, and some Elizabethan-era ones, did just that. In this case, it is easier for the authorities to apprehend individuals -- but they risk bestowing on the heresy the appeal of martyrdom.

Martyrdom is a powerful propaganda tool, but so is slander: bizarre allegations were routinely brought against heretics, aberrant sexual behavior was a staple accusation.

Sometimes, the establishment will have to be careful. The more a society is tolerant, the wider the rights of dissidents and freethinkers will be; today, the Catholic Church finds quiet ways to express its displeasure with outspoken priests and radical theologians, but it will rarely resort to excommunication. This would lead to accusations of intolerance and publicity for the excommunicated. But even in the past, disciplinary measures couldn't be taken lightly against popular personalities. St. Francis of Assisi was left alone, although his ideas were carefully monitored, some of his followers were harassed or disciplined, and the early writings about him were expurgated.

In the end, it may happen that the heretics gain the upper hand and the deviation becomes the rule. Usually, the persecuted become persecutors (Christians and Pagans after 313 AD, Catholics and Protestants in 15th-century England). An unstable balance, however, can last for a while; today, many Muslim scholars believe that Fundamentalism is against the basic principles of Islam, but you won't easily hear that opinion in a mosque.

The Heresiarch

Virtually all heresies start with a charismatic, inspired leader. Its followers will call him a prophet, holy man or even a saint, the lay authorities will say he's a subversive, and the established Church will brand him a heresiarch (a leader in heresy).

In truth, the most successful heretical creeds spread quickly because they tackle some widely felt issue; so it could be argued that it's the historical need that spawns a leader, not the other way around, and that if Luther had remained loyal

to the Roman Church, someone else would have taken his place.

Nevertheless, the actual heresiarch's ideas will be strongly imprinted not only on the birth but also on the developments of the movement. He will act as a rallying point, his speeches or writings being fervently spread around. His personal fixations and attitudes will influence the lives of thousands. If he's put to death, this might be the real test of the popularity of his views: if the heresy wasn't just based on his own personal charisma, his exemplary death will urge others to continue his struggle. If he's imprisoned or harassed, or otherwise interfered with, he might become the focus of intrigues, daring enterprises or covert operations.

A *GURPS* Heresiarch -- Design Notes

While the article strives to supply generic information, this is a system-specific modular *GURPS* Template. It's fit for a NPC totaling 120 points, more experienced than the average starting PC. Note however that for a heresiarch, he's either the leader of a small group or at the beginning of his career.

Attributes: The heresiarch needs, if not sheer genius, at least great intelligence, so IQ begins at 13. All other attributes are left alone.

Advantages: The heresiarch has some advantages that will represent the heresiarch's magnetic personality and others for his additional gifts, and a few more to cover his social standing and his own cult. A few points will be assigned to one of two mutually exclusive packages.

Disadvantages: Some mental disadvantages will address this leader's driving motivation. Others will portray his flaws and the animosity he engenders. Again there are some alternate packages.

Skills: The Primary Skills will let the heresiarch shape his own faith or theory, lead his followers, and organize them. Since nobody is a heresiarch on his first working day, the Secondary Skills will cover his previous career; they include specialization packages. The Background Skills will be used to make the heresiarch a son of his times, therefore they are provided by two TL packages.

Heresiarch Template

(120 points)

Attributes: ST 10 [0], DX 10 [0], IQ 13 [30], HT 10 [0].

Advantages: 20 points in any combination of: Charisma [5/level]; Reputation [varies]; Sanctity [5]; and Voice [10].
10 points in any combination of: Appearance [varies]; Claim to Hospitality [1 to 10]; Sensitive [5]; Single-Minded [5]; Strong Will [4/level]; and Unusual Background [varies].

20 points in any combination of: Ally [varies] and/or Ally Group [varies]; Contacts [varies]; Favor [varies]; Literacy [10]; Status [5/level]; and Wealth [varies].

Specialization Packages: 20 points in any one of the following packages:

- *Religious Leader:* any combination of: Clerical Investment [5/level - almost compulsory]; Legal Immunity [5/level]; Pious [5]; and additional investments in Reputation and Status.
- *Political Leader:* any combination of: Administrative (or other) Rank [5/level]; Legal Immunity [5/level]; Pious [5]; and additional investments in Contacts, Reputation, Status and Wealth.

Disadvantages: Enemy [-5]; Reputation [-5]; and -25 points in any combination of: Compulsive Behavior [-5 to -15]; Delusions [-5 to -15]; Duty [varies]; Edgy [-5] or Paranoid [-10]; Fanaticism [-15]; Intolerance [-5/-10]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Obsession [-5 to -15]; Overconfidence [-10] or Glory Hound [-15]; Sense of Duty [varies]; Voices [varies] or Flashbacks [varies]; Stubbornness [-5]; Vow [-5 to -15]; greater liabilities from worse or more frequent Enemies and/or Reputation; and any physical Disadvantage, preferably not one implying Reaction penalties.

Specialization Packages: -15 points in any one of the following packages:

- *Religious Leader*: any combination of: Disciplines of Faith [varies]; Excommunicated [-5/-10]; Secret [varies]; and more points from Duty and Vow.
- *Political Leader*: any combination of: Secret [varies]; and more points from Enemy, Duty and Reputation.

Primary Skills: Administration (M/A) IQ [2]-13; Bard (M/A) IQ+2 [6]-15; Leadership (M/A) IQ [2]-13; 8 points in any of: Conspiracy Theory (M/VH); Philosophy (M/H); Politics (M/A); and Theology (M/H); and 8 points in any of: Acting (M/A); Intimidation (M/A); Savoir-Faire (M/E); Teaching (M/A); and Writing (M/A).

Secondary Skills: 10 points in any of: Area Knowledge (M/E); Diplomacy (M/H); Fast-Talk (M/A); Gesture (M/E); History (M/H); Psychology (M/H); Sex-Appeal (M/A(HT)); Strategy (M/H).

Specialization Packages: 8 points in any one of the following packages:

- *Religious Leader*: any of: Literature (Holy Texts) (M/H); Performance/Ritual (M/A); Sacrifice (M/H); Singing (P/E(HT)); and a ritual language (such as Latin, (M/A)).
- *Political Leader*: any of: Carousing (P/A (HT)); Economics (M/H); Law (M/H); Merchant (M/A); and a language.

Background Skills: A total of 6 points in any one of the following packages:

- *Low Tech*: any of: Calligraphy (P/A); Heraldry (M/A); Hiking (P/A (HT)); Illumination (P/A); Naturalist (M/H); Riding (P/A); and appropriate Combat/Weapon Skills.
- *High Tech*: any of: Computer Operation (M/E) and/or Typing (PE); Driving (P/A); Electronics Operation (M/A); Video Production (M/A); and appropriate Combat/Weapon Skills.

Note that the above template wouldn't suffice for a wizardly heresiarch, or for a religious leader in a game world where gods actively intervene in worldly matters.

A wizardly/cinematic heresiarch might count among his Advantages: Blessed [variable]; Clerical Investment [varies, especially if it includes Clerical Magery]; Destiny [varies]; Divination Talent [5]; Higher Purpose [5]; Magery [varies]; Oracle [15]; Power Investiture [10].

As to Disadvantages, he might have: Cursed (-75) or Cursed (Divine Curse) [varies]; Destiny [varies]; Excommunicated [-5/-10]; and Jinxed [varies]. Such a heresiarch might have special Skills too, such as: Hidden Lore (M/A); Occultism (M/A); Meditation (M/VH); Thaumatology (M/VH); and magical spells and skills.

Further *Pyramid* reading:

- ["The Gods Above And Below."](#) by Owen S. Kerr
- ["Alternative Societies and Applied Cult Theory"](#) by Max Lybbert
- ["How to Grow a Cult in 10 Easy Steps"](#) by Owen S. Kerr

Freedom of the Press

Journalism in *GURPS Discworld*

by Phil Masters

(Note: This article is primarily intended for [GURPS Discworld](#) GMs whose campaign is set after the events of *The Truth*. However, it could also be of interest to any fantasy game GM whose worlds somehow acquire a certain item of TL4 technology -- and certain associated social behaviors.)

Following the events of *The Truth*, Ankh-Morpork has acquired its first newspaper. Now, one thing about newspapers is that, even if they don't actually make money, some people are always convinced that they *could*. Meanwhile, other people just want to own them, out of vanity, idealism, or whatever derangement afflicts them. Thus, while the first attempt at a competitor for the *Times*, the *Inquirer*, was less than glorious, it seems pretty safe to assume that Ankh-Morpork will soon acquire its third, fourth, and fifth newspapers. Furthermore, on the reliable principle that when Ankh-Morpork scratches, the Sto Plains get eczema, it's pretty darned certain that the idea will soon start spreading. And on top of *that*, with the growth of the new semaphore tower system (see *The Fifth Elephant* or [GURPS Discworld Also](#)), newspapers based in major cities will surely soon start employing correspondents in Foreign Parts, whether salaried or freelance.

All this, it must be obvious, opens up whole new areas of possibility of excitement, adventure, and confusion for RPGs. How they get mixed up in the wonderful world of journalism is up to them and the GM, but once they're in, things can get very interesting very quickly.

After all, in the old days, people usually only wanted you dead because they wanted your money, or you'd taken their money, or you'd been *exceptionally* rude to them, or you were standing between them and power or glory, or because they were mad as hell and not going to take any more, or because of something your grandfather did or didn't do to their grandfather. In this new world, you can get into big trouble for telling the truth, or for telling very *little* lies (to several thousand readers). The possibilities for fun are *endless*.

Journalist Template

(45 points)

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [20]; HT 10 [0].

Advantages: Contacts (two local individuals, both 1 point base value, quite often, somewhat reliable) [4]; Literacy [5]; and a total of 15 points from: Acute Vision [2/level]; Alcohol Tolerance [5]; Alertness [5/level]; Ally (sidekick, photographer, etc.) [varies]; Charisma [5/level]; Collected [5]; further Contacts (almost anyone) [varies]; Cool [1]; Danger Sense [15]; Daredevil [15]; Empathy [15]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Higher Purpose (report the truth) [5]; Intuition [15]; Language Talent [2/level]; Less Sleep [3/level]; Light Hangover [2]; Patron (editor) [varies]; Pious [5]; Sensitive [5]; Single-Minded [5]; or Strong Will [4/level].

Disadvantages: A total of -15 points from: Alcoholism [-15]; Bully [-10]; Code of Honor ("good reporting" -- always protect your sources, stand by fellow reporters who haven't let the profession down too badly, treat secrecy as a personal challenge, never actually *lie* in print) [-5]; Attentive [-1]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Callous [-6]; Curious [varies]; Delusions ("people really want the truth") [-5]; Duty (to the paper -- *usually* non-life-threatening) [varies]; Glory Hound [-15]; Imaginative [-1]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Jealousy [-10]; Nosy [-1]; Oblivious [-3]; Odious Personal Habits (various minor foibles, for -1 reactions) [-5]; Overconfidence [-10]; Responsive [-1]; Sense of Duty (exploited people

or the truth) [-10]; Struggling [- 10]; Stubbornness [-5]; Undiscriminating [-1]; or Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills: Profession (Journalist) (M/A) IQ [2]-12, and *either* Writing *or* Photography (Discworld) (both M/A) IQ [2]-12.

Secondary Skills: Acting (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Area Knowledge (current or former base of operations) (M/E) IQ [1]-12.

Background Skills: A total of 10 points in any of Appreciate Beauty (M/VH); Artist (M/H); Bard (M/A); Body Language (M/H); Carousing (P/A:HT); Hidden Lore (City Secrets for home city) (M/A); Climbing (P/A); Detect Lies (M/H); Diplomacy (M/H); Economics (M/H); Fast-Talk (M/A); Languages (any); Law (M/H); Profession (Printer) (M/A); Punning (M/A); Research (M/A); Riding (P/A); Savoir-Faire (M/E); Shadowing (M/A); Shouting at Foreigners (M/H); Stealth (P/A); Streetwise (M/A); Tracking (M/A); or any Primary or Secondary skill (including whichever Primary option was *not* chosen).

Notes: This template represents a reasonably experienced and capable journalist, or someone with a natural talent for the job. Because the profession is so new, there will be a lot of people pursuing it whose skills and abilities are somewhat askew to what makes a fully effective reporter. High skill in Photography will get the character forgiven a *lot* of other deficiencies, whereas a high score in Writing without actual Journalist skill will merely make one's editor angry at the amount that has to be done to make one's pieces usable.

In this setting, the Professional Skill "Journalist" covers knowing how the publication system works, who to talk to about some fact or problem, what the public are and aren't likely to be interested in, and how to put together a short, attention- grabbing caption or headline. The latter task *only* can also be accomplished with a roll against Writing-3. (The penalty reflects the fact that "ordinary" good writing for most purposes is rarely as terse and snappy as good journalese.) A roll against this skill may also enable a character to assess the political and social dynamics of a situation or place with which he or she is familiar, but *not* to manipulate that situation; it gives a pragmatic outsider's view of the matter, and a basic (and cynical) grasp of motives, but actually getting on in that world requires skills such as Administration, Politics, or Streetwise.

Because journalism on the Disc is still very much in its infancy, with small staffs and a lot of job mobility, there's little distinction between "news" reporters, "features" writers specializing in background and "human interest" pieces, and "critics" writing about the arts. This template encompasses specialists in all three areas as well as professional "photojournalists," and also hacks-of-all-trades who chase whatever stories are going. Appreciate Beauty skill may take a specialty if desired -- preferably an art form which demands specialist critics, such as theater or opera.

Careers in Journalism

For GMs using the Jobs Table to handle PC occupations, four new job entries are detailed below. To reflect the variations in this profession (whose members are actually still trying to decide how it works), distinct entries have been provided for *Freelance Reporter* (obviously a freelance post) and *Staff Reporter* (covering anyone in the full-time pay of a newspaper). In addition, *Editor* covers the benighted, overworked souls who try to run these papers, and *Printer* is included simply to reflect the fact that journalism has appeared largely as a side effect of the spread of movable type in the Disc's cities.

Job (Required Skills), Monthly Income	Success Roll	Critical Failure
<i>Struggling Jobs</i>		
Freelance Reporter* (Profession (Journalist) 10+, Writing <i>or</i> Photography (Discworld) 12+), \$180	Profession (Journalist)	-1i/2d
Staff Reporter (Profession (Journalist) 12+, Writing <i>or</i> Photography (Discworld) 11+), \$200	Best PR	-1i/LJ
<i>Average Jobs</i>		
Editor (Accounting 9+, Administration 9+, Profession (Journalist) 12+, Writing	Profession	-1i/LJ

12+), \$320

(Journalist)

Printer (Profession (Printer) 12+), \$350

PR

-1i/1d

* Freelance Job.

Kind-hearted GMs may give staff reporters who get an 18 on their Job Success Roll 1d days to find a big scoop; if they succeed, they *may* keep their jobs (GM's option, depending on their editor's personality and how good the scoop was).

Editors may be owner-editors, if they have enough wealth or could plausibly have raised loans (which must be repaid!) or found partners to enable them to buy or start the paper themselves. In that case, they can't lose their jobs, but on a Job Success Roll of 18, the paper is in crisis and the editor must work double hours for 1 to 3 weeks, bully as many of his staff as possible into doing the same, and make a series of skill rolls of all sorts to scabble together funds, scoops, and credibility. If at least half of these rolls succeed, the paper survives, but the editor may have to make a Will roll at -2 to avoid becoming an alcoholic. (If the editor was already an alcoholic, he can end up on a binge for 1d+2 days when the crisis is over, and must roll vs. HT+1 or lose a point of HT permanently.)

Non-owner editors *can* lose their jobs, but if they get this result on the table, kindly GMs can make a reaction roll for the newspaper's proprietor, with arbitrary modifiers for how many scoops the paper has achieved lately and how well it has been mirroring the proprietor's own prejudices. If the result is Very Good or Excellent, the editor merely has to work double hours for 1 to 3 weeks; if it's Neutral or Good, follow the rules for an owner-editor above (but it's *probably* just the editor's job that's at stake rather than the whole paper); otherwise, the editor is out.

Campaigning Reporters?

As for actually using this in a game . . .

One option is to run a campaign in which the PCs are closely associated with a newspaper. They don't all have to be journalists as such; reporters might well cultivate useful friendships in the underworld (Thieves' Guild or freelance), the Watch, or even Unseen University or the temples, while a paper with adequate funds, which finds itself sending reporters into dangerous situations, might actually employ reasonably combat-competent bodyguards or "minders" to look after them. (That said, papers are unlikely to be able to afford to pay very good wages, while reporters will probably find that trailing hulking bodyguards everywhere makes it very hard to get contacts to talk much.) Campaigns could then revolve around the quest for good stories, trying to stay one step ahead of law enforcement without either getting into *fatal* trouble or annoying the likes of Commander Vimes too much, building contacts and tracking down mysteries and conspiracies. Of course, if most of the PCs aren't actually employed by the newspaper, there may well be conflicts within the party -- just as there might be if one mixed one or two reporters with a party of watchmen, explorers, or thaumaturgists -- but comic, *Discworld*-style campaigns can usually withstand and even benefit from a bit of mild friction.

A different campaign might be built around non-journalist characters interacting with the press. Non-journalists who are employed to deal with reporters on a *regular* basis are usually actually paid to lie to them, and playing a pack of Discworld spokesmen and spin doctors could have a certain entertainment value. Working for the household of some duke, and trying to stop a bunch of nosy and increasingly suspicious snoopers from discovering that one's employer is bankrupt, planning to invade his neighbors, or just mad as a ferret, could be quite a challenge.

But this is probably an idea with a somewhat limited lifespan; such dealings with the press might work better as one-off scenarios in the course of a more varied campaign. PCs working as watchmen, soldiers, or explorers might enjoy a "change of pace" game in which all they have to do is handle a few questions from some wet-behind-the-ears cub reporter, and keep him out of harm -- until he turns out to be *keen*, unrelentingly energetic, and annoyingly quick-witted. PCs who are all on the illegal side of things will probably regard reporters as an unalloyed nuisance, and may have to be deterred somehow from doing something final to remove the problem. (A few hints that the Watch have come to regard this particular reporter as a good thing on balance, and something of a friend, *might* suffice.) On the other hand again, the Ankh-Morpork Thieves' Guild might decide to build their own friendly relationship with the

press; after all, they're an open, public organization, individual members of which fully understand the benefits of advertising their reasonably priced services. Taking a reporter out to observe the diligence with which they perform licensed muggings, pre-booked burglaries, and the removal of public nuisances (i.e. unlicensed thieves) might seem like a good idea, to them.

Finally, there's the issue of the supernatural to consider. Typical wizards would probably consider reporters as minor pests, and might occasionally fire up their Shapeshift Other spells for pest control, but once a degree of initial mutual suspicion was overcome, the two groups *might* even get on passably well; there's something about shared traditions of hard carousing, heavy smoking, and excessive curiosity about the workings of the world, and wizards would be quite happy to explain that they don't actually *intend* to unleash all those tentacled horrors on their environment (so that's all right then). If journalists collide with witchcraft, the potential confusion is greater; shrewd witches are likely to be cynical about journalists' real motivations, while too many journalists may instinctively wonder if there's a *Naked Rustic Orgy!* headline somewhere in this story. (If there is, it'll surely be nothing to do with any witches, although they'll probably be as interested to find out about it as any journalist, one way or another.)

And as for the divinity business -- well, deities being conservative beings, they probably won't even have much of a clue about what this new human idea is all about, although they might dimly grasp the potential for self-promotion implicit in the printing press. (If a god of journalists should ever manifest, he'll likely be a strange being, prone to being ejected from Dunmanifestin every couple of weeks for asking impertinent questions; his worshippers' prayers are likely to take the form of leading questions and the occasional dubious expenses claim.) Their priests, on the other hand, will surely be divided between crusty old fogeys who regard journalism as a new-fangled menace to be ignored or suppressed, and thrusting, self-important preachers (mostly but not all young) who see it as a way to promote themselves, their good works, their radical theological ideas, and the times of their next big prayer meetings.

Pyramid Review

Full Clip RPG

Full Clip: Hong Kong Action RPG



Published by [Deep7](#)

Written by James Stubbs with Colin Fisk

11-page PDF document; \$3.95

For the latest in its *1PG* line of RPGs, publisher Deep7 has turned to Hong Kong cinema, with its thrillers and action movies in the style of director John Woo. Players get to take on the roles of inscrutable tough guys, gangsters with attitude, and all-too independent cops in a world of honor, the importance of your word, love, romance and flashy displays of visceral violence. Clearly inspired by films such as *Hard Boiled*, *Bullet to the Head*, and *A Better Tomorrow*, *Full Clip* could just as easily handle Hollywood action thrillers as well.

Full Clip comes as a 2.01 meg Adobe Acrobat PDF file, compressed into a 1.92 meg ZIP file and available for download from the [Deep7 website](#). The PDF document is eleven pages long, and consists of a full-color cover, a contents page, a combined character sheet and explanation of character creation, a sheet of notes for the referee, and five scenarios, each also a page long. A vibrant orange-red color scheme is used throughout for the layout, along with pieces of cartoon-style clipart that appropriately illustrate each of the various scenarios. The full-color cover shows gun- and knife- wielding cops and gangsters in a variety of threatening poses, but despite *Full Clip* drawing upon Hong Kong cinema for its source and inspiration, the individuals on the cover are anything but Asian!

A "One-Page" RPG (1PG) is designed to have all of its rules contained on just a single page, as evidenced in Deep7's [Dime Heroes](#) and [Battleforce Bravo: Wartime Adventure](#) RPGs, and *Full Clip* is no different. Character creation is fast and should take no longer than five minutes -- and that's if the players are stuck for names for their characters. The GM tells them the genre of the adventure being run that session, then 1d3 is rolled for the attributes of Sturdiness, Looks, Craftiness, and Brains. 1d6 is rolled and the points assigned to skills. If a player wants a skill not included, it can be added without any fuss. The seventeen skills in *Full Clip* should cover most eventualities of the genre, with those of "Fashion" and "Pose" being more than suited to it. Like the earlier *Battleforce Bravo: Wartime Adventure*, there is no skill to cover first aid or use of medicine, so the GM will need to decide whether it falls under the General Knowledge or Technical Knowledge skills. They will also need to work out what the "Geekery" skill does! Neither attributes nor skills can have a rating higher than three.

Secondary characteristics are Blood, Guts, Cool, and Reputation. Blood represents hit points; once they are gone, the character is dead. A Guts check determines if a character will lose their Cool when undergoing a traumatic experience -- a failed Guts roll decreases the Cool score. When it reaches zero, the character is traumatized, and must roll a four or less to attempt any skill roll.

Reputation is spent to reroll failed skill checks or even call in a favor, but from whom and how exactly this works is pretty much left up to the GM. The problem is that the term "Wits" is used instead of "Cool" on the character sheet, which will probably confuse some people.

As with other 1PG games, two rolls determine background (Criminal, Trafficker, Professional, Soldier, Law Enforcement and Street Fighter) and Status (Wanted, Hit Man, Undercover, Renegade Cop, Playboy and Crime Boss). Each of these adds a few more points to skills and secondary attributes, though the Brawling skill is renamed as "Fighting." Thus, a Trafficker gains +1 to their Bargain, Technical Knowledge, Con, and Cool. The Street Fighter also receives +1 to Cool, Fighting, and Guts, and a +2 to their Blood attribute. The "Wanted" status gives +1 Reputation; Undercover gets +1 Con and Playboy +1 Seduction skill. Two final 1d6 rolls determines a piece of equipment

particular to the character, divided equally between weapons and vehicles, and also the amount of money possessed by each character. It is a pity that this is given in credits rather than in a real currency.

The 1PG skill system is as simple and quick as character creation: Roll 1d6 and get equal to or less than the target. A roll of a six always fails, whereas a one automatically succeeds. Combat uses the same mechanics, but is very deadly as befitting a Hong Kong movie -- if they are lucky, a character might be able to take a couple of pistol rounds before dying. Being a modern set game, some armor is available, but its protection is minimal -- a single point for wearing denim, two for leather and four if wearing a bullet proof vest, and in a Hong Kong action movie, it just postpones the inevitable! One problem in handling combat is that there is a little disparity between the damages listed on the player's and the GM's sheets, but it is an easy matter for the GM to settle.

The advice to the GM on running *Full Clip* is short and to the point as the intended playing style -- "cut to the chase." This is not intended as an in-depth game or for long term play, but rather as a series of one-shots or movies that should last as long as a movie experience, say a single evening -- two to three hours at most. These adventures are one-shots because most sequels to Hong Kong movies rarely turn out to be as popular as the first, and not every character is meant to come out of the story alive . . . the bad guys usually cut down a cast of good guys down to just a few for the climax!

Of the five scenarios included, James Stubbs writes the first three and Colin Fisk the last two. Each is organized in an easily read fashion -- with a description of the scenario's style, premise, and set-up -- before giving the major scenes for that movie, from five scenes in "Switchblade Cross" to as many as nine in "Internal Affairs."

[SPOILER ALERT!]

In "Switchblade Cross," members of a rival gang, the Jade Ghosts, have kidnapped one of the character's sisters. It is an unwritten rule that family is kept out of gang affairs, but they have crossed the line. Though they are offering her in return for a "fair trade," the characters will soon learn that the Jade Ghosts want more. It is up to the characters to not only rescue their sisters and avoid both whatever the Jade Ghosts want plus encounters with the police . . . and above all, take the opportunity to teach the Jade Ghosts a good lesson in manners.

"Triggerman's Daughter" is intended as a one-on-one scenario between the GM and single player. Hong Kong's most feared hit man, Lee Choi, has gone on the run after his gangland employers have decided that he has become a liability and want him dead. Unable to find Choi, they plan to kill his daughter, but Choi is offering a deal to the police. He will tell all about several unsolved murders if the police keep his daughter safe. This is where the PC, as a renegade or cowboy cop, comes in, as he is assigned to protect the daughter. Of course, the safe house location is blown and they are on the run, bound to fall in love. (This is a movie, right?) It is possible for "Triggerman's Daughter" to be played with two characters rather than one, allowing for a potential love triangle rather than the single affair.

"Business of Killers" returns the players to the underworld, this time as killers for hire. When a CEO refuses to repay his extensive gambling debts, then casino owner, Shin Lau is going to lose a lot of face. Instead he puts a contract out on the CEO and the players are hired to do the job. Gunning him down or blowing him up is all too easy, it needs to be done with style and flair, in such a way that nobody refuses to pay their debts.

"Internal Affairs" can be played as a possible sequel to "Triggerman's Daughter" in which the renegade cops are secretly asked to clean up the department, including Internal Affairs. But the corrupt elements are on to the heroes and have planted all-too-incriminating evidence in their cars, which puts the legitimate, clean police force on their tails. Naturally, the renegades have to go on the run, prove their innocence, and bring the bad cops down.

Finally, in "Hong Kong Tong" the characters are gangsters on their way to the top. All that stands in the way are the weakened Narcotics Task Force of the Hong Kong Police. Take them out and you can be top dog in the city, but your moves have aroused the interest of a mainland gang eager to move into easier territory.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

As a set of one-shots, *Full Clip* presents more than decent value for its cost. What lets it down is the less-than-perfect

presentation we have come to expect from the *IPG* series of games from Deep7, giving it a slightly hurried feel. All of the scenarios are well-written and the format is perfect for whenever a gaming group needs something to play that night and nobody has anything prepared. A *IPG* scenario can be readied in mere minutes and provide a good evening's entertainment. Even if you never get around to playing any of these five adventures, there is nothing to stop you raiding them for ideas for your own campaign, whether that be for *Feng Shui*, *Hong Kong Action Theater*, or any of the campaigns in the [Enter the Zombie](#) supplement for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*. Beyond that, the scenarios in *Full Clip: Hong Kong Action* could be used as models for the GM to create similar ones, based upon movies that they like. If Deep7 wants to expand upon the genre of Hong Kong action movies, it would be great to see a "Wuxia" *IPG* title.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Pick

Magic: The Gathering Online

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

CDROM (\$14.95); Download (Free, 196.5 MB)

Other Costs: *Account* -- \$9.99 (or free with CD-ROM; no monthly fees); *Cards* -- varies (\$9.99 worth of free cards with account)

Back in 1992 (or 1993?) while I was serving at the 32nd Street Naval station in San Diego, I was in my friendly local game store over in El Cajon. I had gone there to pick up a copy of *Knights: Strategies in Motion*, a *Primal Order* book from a little company called Wizards of the Coast. While there, the owner asked me if I had seen this new card game called *Magic: The Gathering*.

They were out of starter decks that day, so I picked up a booster out of curiosity. After all, they were cheap -- even if I never used the cards, I was not out much. Although I had no rule book and understood none of the numbers or the terms, looking over my 15 cards and the beautiful artwork I concluded that this was a game that I wanted to play.

I presented my new cards to a friend. He asked a few others over to look. Before we knew it, we had a group of about a dozen or so people buying cards. Within two weeks, it managed to take over about a third of our gaming time, nudging out our regular favorite of *Star Fleet Battles*. Within a month, it was over half of our gaming time and most of our gaming budget. We were hooked.

We played after work, we played during our lunch breaks, we played anytime we could. It required no setup to speak of, and every game was different. There was a joy of seeing a card being played you had not seen before. Then came things like *Arabian Knights* and *Antiquities* . . . each new set offered new opportunities, new rules and new paths to follow.

I left 32nd Street, and reported to the *USS Carl Vinson* where I found a huge array of new players. When I left the ship, I left the Navy shortly afterwards. Arriving back home in Cedar Rapids in 1997, I found no good local game stores and few players (there may have been some, but I could not find them). I tried to get others to play, but with few outlets for cards, I found my collection sitting idle and unused. I said goodbye to my 15,000+ cards and sold the entire collection on eBay.

Since that time I have often wanted to get into the game again. However, my main problems include the fact that most of the venues where I can find regular players are not very good. In fact, the one decent game store that has cropped up in Cedar Rapids since 1997 gets completely trashed on *Magic* nights. The crowd is arrogant, relatively closed, and not terribly mature.

So, when I first got word that *Magic* would be moving to an online forum, I was interested, but in a distant sort of way. How could this be as good as sitting in front of a friend, shooting the breeze while you played a nice leisurely game? I was not sure, but I figured I would give it a try.

The first step in this exploration was to look at the download for the client. This can be found [here](#). The problem was obvious: although this demo has been downloaded over 100,000 times, it is a whopping 196.5 MB in one file!

Requirements:

- Windows 95, 98, NT (Service Pack 4), 2000, or XP
- PII 333 or faster
- 64 Megs of RAM
- Mouse
- SVGA, High-Color (16bit)
- 4x CD ROM
- 600 MB of hard drive space
- Internet connection (56k or faster)



No thanks. So . . . off to find the CD.

The package weighs in at about \$15 and comes with the client on the CD and two printed, full color books: one with the rules for *Magic* and other dealing with how to use the client software. In addition to this, purchasing the package gives you a free account with the system (normally \$9.99) as well as \$9.99 in free virtual cards -- exactly the amount needed for one of the pre-built theme decks. In other words, it would appear that it is more expensive to download this free-trial, as you would then have to pay almost \$20 to get the cards and the account you get free with the \$15 CD purchase (unless the free cards comes with a paid account from the download; I confess that I'm not sure about that one).

The installation, account creation, and card purchase systems are all very smooth and painless. Well, it's almost painless. The first pain you get is when you realize that these virtual cards cost every bit as much as their physical counterparts. How much is that? Well, from the *Magic* Online FAQ:

- 75-card tournament packs: \$9.99
- 60-card theme decks: \$9.99
- 40-card Seventh Edition theme decks: \$7.99
- 15-card booster packs: \$3.29

At first, I thought this an odd thing, considering the fact that they cost nothing to produce. However, there is an upside: there are no monthly fees. Once you have the cards and the account, they are yours. You can continue to play them for as long as you like without ever paying another dime to Wizards of the Coast. The only time you pay anything for this online game is when you feel like paying a little more for it. So it's like this: if I decided I don't feel like playing *Magic* for a few months, I am out nothing for those few months. However, if I get the itch to play a game, I can log on, load my deck and go -- *still* without paying anything...

Game play is handled well, the interface is intuitive and easy to use. Those that played the old *Magic: The Gathering* PC game (along with the *Spells of the Ancients* add-on) will recognize it as the same basic interface developed there.

The rules all appear to be handled very well. I have played a few dozen games and have yet to see even a questionable result take place. This makes the constant bickering over just how a given effect is supposed to be handled a thing of the past. When displaying cards, you can view all key-words as shaded text and get a definition and game effect of that term by clicking on it.

There is a simple yet elegant chat feature that allows you to converse with the player you are with (or anyone in the room, if you are not in a game at that point). It is rather amazing how much the people of the game want to chat while they play. It is not quite as good as having someone across the table from you, but it can be quite rewarding.

Cards from the *7th edition* and all of the current releases like *Torment*, *Apocalypse*, and such are available. The game indicates that when card sets are released for the physical game, they will be released simultaneously for the online game. They also warn that when this happens, expect to have rather large updates run on your system to get all of the new card information.

There are virtual rooms in the game to play against new players, casual games (theme decks, constructed decks and serious decks), official games (that effect an online rating system), tournament play, and more. In the new player room, you can play with an assortment of pre-constructed decks -- these decks do not require that you own the cards in them to use them. The cards are available for purchase, of course, and cannot be used outside of that room without being purchased.

In these rooms, you are shown as a simple avatar. If you want to play a game, you either click on the new game option which places your avatar at an empty table waiting. Otherwise, look for an empty chair at a table, and click on that to join a game someone else initiated. Its as simple as that. If you do not like the graphical representation of the rooms, there is an option for a table-view so that you can look at the people currently in games or waiting to find opponents. In fact, nearly every screen in the game has a "text-based" option if that is easier for you. And all of the table-views can be sorted in any way you wish.

There are areas in the game for you to view your current collection of Virtual Cards (as well as places to hold an inventory of your physical cards). From here, there is a deck builder that allows you to sift through your collection and construct your deck point-and-click style. All of these features have extensive search and filter options making it rather easy to find the cards you are looking for. Once you are done, save the deck and it can be recalled at will. Additionally, there is a feature that will analyse your deck in a multitude of ways so you can look for potential shortcomings.

All in all, the software is excellent. So . . . the game works well, the interface is solid and the cards are all there. Is there anyone to play? Oh my, yes!

I have yet to log on without having 1,000 or more people in the Casual Play rooms. I have never had to wait more than 15 seconds for a game if I wanted one. Play was always smooth and error-free and it was fun, once again, to play. Especially since I had not seen many of these cards before.

I think I will be sticking around, and if you ever find yourself up there and see KDLadage waiting for a game, drop on in. I'd love to teach you just how tough my little White-Green deck can be . . .

--K. David Ladage

Pyramid Review

Target: Wastelands

Target: Wastelands (for Shadowrun)



Published by [FanPro](#)

Written by **Rob Boyle, Steve Kenson, Michelle Lyons Ken Peters, Lucien Soulban, John Schmit, and Jon Szeto**

136 b&w pages; \$20.00

Shadowrun, as the back cover of this book states, is a game about going places you're not supposed to. Cracking a corporate mainframe, sneaking into an archeology, or sleazing into a Bavarian castle, standard intrusions are what the game is all about. With *Target: Wastelands*, we get a guide to places that you seriously wouldn't want to go.

Target: Wastelands, as its name implies, is about the most hostile places in the world. It divvies them up by terrain type instead of geographically; so two deserts on opposite sides of the world are listed together, and the north and south poles share a chapter.

The cover is a nice piece by Mark Zug, showing a pair of Shadowrunners under attack by some type of toxic spirit. The good news is they have a secret weapon of some kind; the bad news is it won't do them any good if the woman on the left doesn't get her knee off the hose. The gallows humor of it was worth a chuckle.

The first portion of the book details Toxic environments. *Shadowrun* has always had a bit of a "green" bias to it, with nature-loving Shaman PCs as the good guys and Toxic Ravager Shamans as the bad guys. The best way to tell if a corp is a bad guy is to look at its environmental record (hint: very few of them have good environmental records).

The book details what toxic locations are in the *Shadowrun* universe. There's a discussion of a number of toxic hot spots, ranging from Tripoli to the Native American Nation of Tshimshian to Los Angeles, although it might have been nicer to see some info or rumors about toxic shamans and their wider operations and methodologies. The Eco-Alerts have nice game hooks scattered among them, though, and will prove useful if a GM wants to set his game in any of them.

Each of the terrain chapters gives some basic info on what it's like to be in the environment, what kinds of survival gear you'll need, how to protect gear and magical equipment, and other useful info. It's interesting to note that they don't feel it was necessary to add a White Wolf-esque disclaimer about not attempting to survive using these tips. The desert chapter starts off by detailing the Desert Wars fought annually in the rad-blasted sands of the Sahara in the former Libya. There is a fair amount of information in here, filling in the reader about the curiosity that's been bubbling since they first mentioned Desert Wars back in the original *Seattle Sourcebook*. Essentially, it's a combination war game/Reality TV show. The opportunities for Shadowrunner action are slightly constrained, since these are some of the most highly trained soldiers in the world walking around in their own environment. There is still a fair bit of extraction/sabotage/espionage to be had, although a high level of caution will be necessary. This section also examines the rest of the world's deserts, from the Gobi to the Kalahari and back to the Sahara. The Mojave seems conspicuous by its absence, since it should be of some importance with its location.

After hot, the book goes to cold. The two poles and their respective inhabitants and wonders are examined. The North Pole is the more inhabited one, and its territory is claimed by one of the NAN, the Trans-Polar Aleut nation. The T-PA is starting to fall apart, but since it's so sparsely populated, it's not exactly turning out to be a "hot" revolution.

Soon, the poles shift and the narrative takes us all the way down under to Antarctica. The continent's Lovecraftian

resonance makes it a good place for adventuring, and there are a number of interesting things going on down there. There are even remote automated prisons, located deep in the frigid continent.

The chapter on Space stations is interesting, but short; it seems that extra-terrestrial items in the game should have been given their own book. As it was, there wasn't nearly enough info on the various space stations and the corporate/national space programs. Even a couple of maps could have done a lot to help round things out. This section does a good job of laying out the cards on the table, and hopefully more space items will be covered in future books.

The undersea chapter is also interesting, and seems to be the best of the book in terms of usability. There are lots of opportunities for mischief available, the aquatic world is not too hard to get to, 'runners won't be outclassed by most of the inhabitants, and underwater facilities are a classic adventure idea. The chapter has interesting bits on the various underwater inhabitants, although again it seems this material could have been a book on its own; it would have complemented the Cyber-pirates and Smuggler's Havens books.

The book wraps up with a chapter on rules, mainly dedicated to keeping PCs alive in the various settings. There are toys and tests galore, including a section on how to survive decompression (answer: you won't). There are also suggestions on getting PCs into the various Wasteland settings.

Target: Wastelands is a good addition to the *Shadowrun* library. It is indicative of the new direction *Shadowrun* supplements are taking towards providing wide ranging books that cover subjects with less detail than previous supplements have. This is, of course, unlikely to satisfy those who are sticklers for details; fans of the original *Seattle Sourcebook* -- with its pages of specific facts -- may be disappointed. Even so, **Target: Wastelands** manages to be very useful. Sure, the depth of knowledge may be shallow, but this book's breadth more than compensates for it.

--Justin Mohareb

If It Has Stats, It Can Be Visited

In my life, I have been stuck in four different airports ("stuck" defined as "spending longer than eight hours waiting for a plane"). And, despite the fact that the basic premise is the same - stuck at airport - the result has been quite different each time.

Tallahassee Regional Airport is tiny and cozy. Atlanta International feels like a cross between the Jetsons and Blade Runner. Detroit's airport is as old, uninspiring, and depressing as its city. Ft. Lauderdale is, like much of south Florida, devoid of a soul . . . but more resembling a clean slate rather than a zombie.

Anyway, the point is that many experiences seem to repeat, but are different because of the setting or context. Almost every wedding is different, despite certain themes that come up involving vows, rings, and kisses. A dozen college bars will all feel different, even in the same town.

Now, some common GM advice says to write down descriptions for settings the PCs may be likely to visit, or have visited. This is good advice, in theory; if you need to make up the Incognito Virgin Inn for one session and the players want to go back, it would be nice to be able to recreate the location. But in practice this has its problems. First off, creating locations takes a fair bit of time; having 50-word descriptions for a dozen locations requires a fair bit of writing. If you create the locations ahead of time, you either need steer players to those locales or else kludge descriptions. ("Why does this temple resemble a general store?" "Well . . . I had a general store left over . . .") If you create locations on the fly, then you need to disrupt the game to record information ("<scribble> tavern has hidden pit trap . . ."), remember to record it after the game, or risk losing that location altogether.

So last week I was trying to think of a different way to record locales last week, when I had something of an epiphany.

When describing characters in most game systems, we have a perfectly good shorthand; it's rare to need to write out, "Thog the Barbarian is very strong - able to dead-lift 500 pounds easily - but not terribly smart. He is prone to bad decisions, and is of average appearance . . ." Why? Because characters have stats, and stats tell us a great deal about what the character is like without saying a word.

So why can't locations have stats?

Even if a more "formal" system isn't developed or feasible in your game system (how many locations need a Dodge attribute?), a loose system can provide many of the benefits of full write-ups, while still being fast enough to do on the fly *or* ahead of time quickly.

For example, in my campaign I may create a sheet like this for commercial locations:

Commercial Location					
Name:	_____				
Proprietor:	_____				
Cost	1	2	3	4	5
Popularity	1	2	3	4	5
Friendliness	1	2	3	4	5
Chance of Finding What You Want	1	2	3	4	5
Financial Health	1	2	3	4	5
Size	1	2	3	4	5
_____	1	2	3	4	5

_____	1	2	3	4	5
_____	1	2	3	4	5
_____	1	2	3	4	5

Thus *Cost* would mean how expensive it is for the location to do what it does; *Popularity* would refer to how busy (or not) the location is; and so on. Assuming a 1-5 scale, where 1 is "not at all", 3 is "average" or "middle of the road", and 5 is "yes! very!", it becomes trivial to create a fairly detailed portrait in a matter of seconds. Also note the blank stat lines; this lets a location be detailed with an "attribute" easily tailored to itself. (Of course, if a fill-in attribute gets used too often, I could easily add it as a "real" stat.)

Thus with this system I can create settings like:

Chez 'Spensivé Carmon Fleur (Maitre d')

Cost	5
Popularity	3
Friendliness	2
Chance of Finding What You Want	4
Financial Health	4
Size	1
Hobnob	4

The Rusty Lantern Knifey (bartender)

Cost	2
Popularity	5
Friendliness	4
Chance of Finding What You Want	2
Financial Health	5
Size	3
Chance of Getting In a Bar Brawl	4
Tolerance	2

City Bus Station (various)

Cost	1
Popularity	2
Friendliness	1

Chance of Finding What You Want	1
Financial Health	2
Size	3
Desperation	5
Illicit Activities	3

This form can be filled out in 10 words or less, and 10 or less circles, but it can tell you a lot about a place at a glance:

- Chez 'Spensivé is a cozy but expensive restaurant; the staff isn't the friendliest in the world, but they work hard to deliver what the customer wants. It is somewhat popular, probably limited by the expense of dining there. Still, the business does well, and it manages to provide an environment suitable for the area's elite, who often frequent the establishment.
- The Rusty Lantern is a good-sized tavern-inn. Reasonably priced, it is wildly popular with the community . . . many of whom are bruisers and those aching for a fight. The workers are some of the friendliest around, but since it's an establishment of limited scope, any special requests are usually unable to be filled. The bar and its regulars are also fairly intolerant of those who are different.
- The City Bus Station is a cheap location that does what it sets out to do . . . barely. Unpopular with the community and even its own regulars, this moderately sized place struggles to fulfill its mandates. It is one of the most desperate places in the city, and a variety of illegal activities take place here. Although it probably is in little danger of closing down, it doesn't have the resources necessary for renovations, comfort, or customer satisfaction.

And so on.

The lines at the bottom enable me to scribble any quick notes necessary ("Bartender flirting with Almirah"). And, since it's a "character sheet", it's easy to reflect growth and change in a setting, if it becomes important to the setting or the PCs take actions that would alter a place. Thus the Rusty Lantern's town may have a financial crisis, lowering its Financial Health to 2, raising its Cost to 3, and lowering its popularity to 4.

Now, such forms would probably need to be fabricated by each GM, since each GM and campaign probably has a different idea about what stats are necessary. (Some GMs might think a "Spirituality" attribute would be useful, for example, and a *Shadowrun* game would probably have an Illicit Activities rating for all locations.) And each type of location would probably have a different character sheet - corporate/business, religious, and educational locations might get their own type of sheets, for example, depending on how likely they are to come up in game. But this work is one-time, and the forms themselves are trivial to fill out quickly. (They also work well for randomization, for those who like that sort of thing.)

In all, a simple "character sheet" system can go a long way towards bringing life to the setting, without the hassle and time consumption of long-hand.

And with them, you can also make sure each time heroes get stuck in an airport is a different experience.

* * *

Now some of you may be waiting with bated breath, wondering how DragonCon was for me.

Okay; that's a lie; I'm sure that most of you don't give a tinker's cuss. But too bad . . . I'll tell you anyway.

- I got to meet or re-meet lots of great folks from various media: comics (Julius Schwartz, Carmine Infantino), TV & movies (Mike Nelson, Kevin Murphy), and gaming (Flying Buffalo & GAMA's Rick Loomis, Looney Labs' Andrew Looney, Hero Games' Aaron Allston, Eden Studios' George Vasilakos).
- I got to be part of a group lunch with Hero Games' Steve Long, which was a *lot* of fun. (In discussing upcoming *Champions* releases, Steve bragged about the diversity of character types in the upcoming book of enemies. "We'll even have a stretching villain for the first time!" To which I replied, "Oh, c'mon . . . how do you make

stretching sinister?" Since then I remembered Daredevil foe Stilt Man . . . which, depending on one's worldview, may prove or disprove my point.)

- I bought my first piece of original comic art.
- I lost my first piece of original comic art.
- I bought my second and third pieces of original comic art.
- I did *not* lose them.
- I got to spend time with friends I haven't seen in a year.
- I, yet again, basked in the general friendliness of the convention: staff, dealers, guests, attendees . . . everyone was generally smiling, having a good time, and more than willing to help if possible.
- Despite a schedule snafu where goth/industrial music supplanted the promised 80s music, I "danced" (or whatever history will come to call my arrhythmic gyrations).
- I got to play a fun *Fading Suns* session (kudos to Ryan the GM). Four of my friends and I were signed up for this session, and we had considered plans to be completely evil to him . . . you know, coming in with established subplots between our PCs. ("Okay; no matter what characters we get, my character has an overwhelming desire to get revenge on your character for what you did to his father on Byzantium Secundus, and your character is possessed by a symbiote. Whoever plays a member of the church is rumored to be a prophet of phenomenal renown . . . we'll all make up stories about the great deeds he has done . . .") We did *not* succumb to this temptation, however.
- I got to participate in the "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" improv competition. I somehow won the first round, only to bomb horribly in the semifinal round. It was remarkable; I displayed a level of unfunnyness reserved for uninspiring early 20th century presidents like Taft, whose entire life was punctuated with a void of mirth save once, during a question on gold standard reform at the 1908 Bryan/Taft debate when Salacious Crumb unexpectedly crawled upon his shoulder and cackled with mad abandon. The low point came when I was supposed to impersonate Ted Raimi waiting for an elevator . . . despite my not knowing who Ted Raimi was, nor how I would make his waiting for an elevator amusing. During this sketch I also noticed I had forgotten my homework, and I wasn't wearing any pants. (I can't wait to compete again *next* year!)

In all, DragonCon was everything I go to that convention for: variety, diversity, friendliness, humiliation.

Oh, and the number of "badge shrug-offs" I encountered was surprisingly low. However, the ink they used on the gold-foil guest stickers was apparently not waterproof; after a brief sky-spit storm, a lucky raindrop rendered my nametag as approximately "Steven Mlrgfn." However, on one elevator ride I had the following conversation:

GUY [Squinting to read nametag]: Who are you?

STEVEN: Steven Marsh, editor of *Pyramid* magazine, an online roleplaying game magazine.

GUY: Huh. And you're a guest for *that*?

My fans are legion.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Mystic Masters** (for *Champions*), p. 19.*

(Two stars) "Adverse physical laws. Tangent locals are adapted to some natural law that is likely to adversely affect cross-tangent visitors. For example, the tangent world in question evolved in parallel, but the acceleration of gravity is thrice standard Baseline tangents, and could prove difficult or lethal for cross-tangent visitors."

Guns That Might Have Been

Alternate Firearms for Alternate Histories

by Roland M. Boshnack

When designing an alternate world, the devil is very often in the details. Technology -- and especially 20th-century firearms -- is infinitely mutable. *GURPS Ultra-Tech 2* includes some examples of alternate tech progressions, but these often rely on superscience or broad changes in the public's perception and use of certain concepts. Also, the pathways in *Ultra-Tech 2* are optimized for futuristic (TL8+) timelines and do not work as well for modern equipment. This article attempts to add another level of detail to alternate worlds, focusing on that most common denominator games set in TL6-7: guns. But how does the GM introduce new, believable firearms into his campaign?

Disguise Them

The simplest method of coming up with new designs is to do what real criminals do to conceal the origin of a firearm: change the appearance and file off the serial number. This is very common in movies. For example, the rifles carried by the SWAT team at the beginning of Jet Li's *The One* are nothing more than gussied-up M-4 carbines.

For the GM, nothing could be easier. Simply take one of the many weapons already detailed for *GURPS* and change the designation. Mix up the names of the manufacturers. Add "M-," "Mk.," "X-," etc., to taste and slap a number on the end. Now, instead of a Colt M-16A2, you could have a Heckler & Wesson Mk. 17. While you're at it, describe the weapon differently (if you would describe such things to begin with).

Modify Them

This is a bit more involved, but the results can be quite satisfying. Change the name, as above, and then change the stats around a bit as well. Round ammunition calibers off, or come up with new ones (.223 could become .23, or be replaced with 5mm Colt). Fudge ranges around. Snap Skill and Accuracy are easy to modify: try swapping the two values, or increase/reduce them by up to 5. It's very easy to change the number of shots a weapon holds (but don't go overboard -- no conventional pistol holds a hundred rounds of .45 ACP). Nobody said that weapons have to be perfect! Increase weight, Strength requirements, even recoil, to obscene levels. Have fun, and if anyone asks questions you just say that it was designed by a committee.

Also, try adding accessories to everything. Hollywood movie makers often place red-dot laser sights on any sort of gun, so add them to yours as well (see *GURPS High-Tech* for rules). Forward grips are good for a -1 to Snap Skill, and are another common trend in movies. A scope can add +1 to Accuracy (for a realistic piece) up to +3 (for a huge 8x scope). Folding stocks on rifles give a -1 to Holdout, and the same thing on a pistol gives a +1. Underbarrel grenade launchers can be mounted on any longarm, in theory. An M-203 on an Uzi is stretching things, but could be done.

Invent Them

Finally, for the GM who is dissatisfied with mere ersatz, weapons can be invented and fit into the game in a logical manner. The history of firearms is convoluted. Often weapons will be invented, test out well, and represent definite advances. Unfortunately, these same guns are often rejected for adoption, or worse yet, modified by a committee until they bear little resemblance to the originals. They then disappear from view and are only remembered as "what's-his-name's rifle (or whatever)."

In the past century there have been two important advances that have never realized their full potential due to short-sighted adoption committees. The first is the 7mm (0.276-inch) bullet. Numerous studies have proven that a 7mm bullet is the ideal size for a combat rifle, a theory which has been borne out on the range. Unfortunately, whenever a 7mm design reaches the adoption board it is rejected. The most common excuse given is that the adopting service already has plenty of ammunition in some other caliber, and why change horses midstream? If looked at from the impartial observer angle, this is clearly ridiculous -- what's more important, a few bucks saved or a few lives spared? - but so it goes.

The second major advance that has yet to come to fruition is the caseless rifle. Granted, the Heckler and Koch G11 is now in limited service, but less than 1,000 are in the hands of soldiers. Germany has a valid reason for the small number of rifles bought, as the G11 was in the process of being adopted just as the country reunited, leaving little money for luxuries like new firearms. The United States, on the other hand, has little excuse. During the Advanced Combat Rifle (ACR) tests Heckler and Koch submitted a modified G11 -- which by this point had all the bugs ironed out -- that offered a huge number of improvements over the M-16A2. However, despite its reliability, simplicity, ruggedness, and low ammunition weight and cost, it was rejected simply because it couldn't deliver a guaranteed first-round hit.

Other, more minor changes that never saw widespread service include Volcanic-style cartridges (where the powder is contained within the bullet itself), flechette rounds, automatic shotguns, and modular rifle systems (such as the Stoner Model 63 series). Any of these might be encountered by visitors to alternate worlds.

This article does not concern itself with the exact historical data for firearms. Instead, it concentrates on what might have been. For example, the first entry takes the Pederson rifle (a 7mm competitor to the M-1 Garand) and assumes that it had been adopted. What, then, would the service model have looked like? Perhaps it would have looked something like this:

Rifles

Springfield M-1 Pederson, 7mm Pederson, USA, 1932 (Holdout -7)

John Pederson produced the T2E1 rifle when working for Springfield Armory, but the design suffered from frequent failures to eject. This stumped the designer and led (in our timeline) to the rifle's rejection, but in this world something changed: Pederson realized that if grooves (or flutes) were carved into the rifle's chamber the gas pressure would equalize and the spent shell would eject easily. Chief of Staff MacArthur still disliked the weapon, but was forced to approve it after it showed a clear advantage over the Garand rifle in testing. The weapon went through several minor changes, such as the addition of a removable magazine, and was adopted as the M-1 Pederson in 1932, though service issue didn't begin until 1936. It then served through World War II with distinction, and when NATO formed after the war 7mm became the standard round of the alliance.

Heckler & Koch M-20, 4.7mm Caseless, USA, 1990 (Holdout -6)

In real life, the H&K ACR (Advanced Combat Rifle) was a modified G11 and failed (like all the other ACR firearms) because it could not give a 100% first-round hit probability. However, in this alternate world DARPA dropped the requirement for guaranteed first-round accuracy from the tests after an researcher commented that "we're looking for a combat rifle here, not a magic wand!" After the scores were tabulated and the dust had settled, one clear winner emerged. Therefore, the modified H&K G11 that had been submitted became the U.S. M-20 rifle. Its first combat use was in the deserts of Iraq, where the sealed body proved impervious to sand. After this auspicious debut the M-20 was approved for general adoption. Many soldiers dislike its slab-sided looks, but they soon come to love the weapon's low recoil and excellent reliability.

AAI M-20, 5.56mm Flechette, USA, 1990 (Holdout -7)

Or perhaps the G-11 had suffered from some hidden drawback not related to its ability to punch holes in things at a distance. The U.S. military has always shown a distinct distaste for any firearms not invented in America, so maybe the H&K would have been rejected simply because it was produced in Germany. In this case, the next logical choice would have been the AAI model, which fired a flechette from a standard NATO case. After issues with the gas system were solved, the M-20 went into service just in time for the Persian Gulf War. Interestingly, the flechette cartridge proved to be an unmitigated disaster. The tiny arrow often came apart shortly after leaving the muzzle, and even if it did hit and penetrate it simply passed straight through, meaning that a brain or heart hit was needed to even stop an enemy soldier. The Pentagon, mortified that it had spent millions in yet another boondoggle, modified the rifle into the Duplex-firing M-20A1, in which form it has continued to serve without particular distinction.

Cadillac Gage M-65 System, 5.56mm NATO, USA, 1965 (Holdout varies)

Eugene Stoner was a brilliant engineer but a poor salesman. His Model 63 modular weapon system was a good idea, but just needed the kind of fine-tuning that only general service can provide. However, Stoner simply couldn't get anyone to give his weapons a serious look. In this alternate, after the Navy SEALs bought a handful of M-63 rifles and light machine guns, the Marines decided that they wanted the new rifle as well. After some much-publicized victories wielding the M-63 the U.S. Army Rangers requested some changes to the system to increase the speed of conversions. The improved weapons were standardized as the M-65 system and soon every soldier in the U.S. military carried a version of this weapon.

The fast conversion time has seen the greatest impact with snipers. These soldiers no longer have to choose between carrying two large weapons or carrying just one which is useless in a regular firefight. Now teams insert with M-65s configured as assault rifles and carrying just the spare barrel and (maybe) stock, and can switch over to sniper rifles when the time is right.

Note that acquiring one of these weapons, with a supply of extra modular parts, is a huge boon to world-jumpers. Not only does it fire a very common cartridge, it can act as several dozen different firearms -- all in a package that is easily carried through jumps!

Machine Guns

FN M-250, 15.5mm FN, Belgium, 1991 (Holdout n/a)

Historically, FN ran into financial problems just as the BRG-15 was perfected and it was shelved. Alternately, had the company been better-run, this design would have most likely become the standard Western heavy machine gun design. When submitted to tests in the United States it easily defeated the venerable Browning M-2HB and became the M-250 HMG. Its most noticeable feature is that it has a dual-feed with a large "tuning-fork" selector. This has two advantages. First of all, the effective rate of fire is increased as the weapon can be reloaded while it is firing. Secondly, it can be loaded with two different kinds of ammunition (usually solid and API) and the gunner can easily switch between them depending on the target. Note that the weapon table, below, assumes just one belt of ammunition. For two simply add in the extra ammo's weight.

Vorwerk MG12, 7.92mm Mauser, Germany, 1932 (Holdout n/a)

An unusual twin-barreled machine gun, the Gast-MG was invented during the closing months of World War I to provide a high rate-of-fire weapon for aircraft. Development halted with the end of the war, but on some timelines the design was resurrected by the Nazis for World War II. The original 192-round drums were replaced by standard 75-round saddle drums, but by 1935 these were replaced again with 200-round belts -- which were again replaced by 192-round drums, bringing the design full circle. The Gast-MG is a fascinating weapon (both the historical and alternate versions) as it used the recoil from one barrel to operate the other, resulting not only in rates of fire approaching miniguns but also increasing the reliability of the system.

Submachine Guns

Hotchkiss MAT48, 9mm Parabellum, France, 1948 (Holdout -3 when folded)

The Hotchkiss "Universal" was the last design from the venerable company and was a commercial failure due to its overly complex construction. But with a tweak here, a simplification there, and a handy space-time continuum fold, the design succeeded and was passed to Tulle Armory for construction. Its introduction replaced the historical MAT49. The end result is a conventional submachine gun that can be folded into a tiny package, even smaller than the MAT49.

Game Rules

Most of these firearms need only a stat line for use in *GURPS*, and are listed at the end of this article. However, the Stoner 65 system does deserve further examination.

Each Stoner 65 weapon consists of four basic subassemblies -- action, stock, barrel, and magazine -- and can also have several optional parts, such as a scope or bipod. To build a firearm of this series, simply pick the appropriate assemblies from the list below. Make sure you keep a running total of the weapon's weight, holdout modifier, and cost. Note that the Snap Skill, ST, and Recoil stats have been fudged a bit. To get more accurate numbers, use the rules for hand-held weapons as given in *GURPS Vehicles* (sidebar, p. 126).

It takes 30 seconds to swap a subassembly, provided that it is ready to be installed. Only a Guns+4 roll is needed to do this correctly, regardless of the number of parts to be swapped, and then only in stressful situations (like being under fire). On a critical success the time is halved (15 seconds). On a regular success the listed time is used. On a regular failure the time is doubled (60 seconds) and on a critical failure one of the parts is damaged and cannot be used until repaired (usually the most expensive piece).

Stoner M-65s use Guns (Rifle) skill when fired at semiautomatic, Guns (Light Auto) when used at fully automatic, and Gunner (Machine Gun) when fired from the tripod. Note that all Stoner 65s have a malfunction rating of "critical."

Barrels (pick one)

- **Short** -- Dam. 5d-1, SS 10, Acc 10, 1/2D 450, Max. 3,500, Wt. 2.5, \$150, Holdout -2
- **Standard** -- Dam. 5d, SS 12, Acc 10, 1/2D 500, Max. 3,800, Wt. 3.5, \$200, Holdout -3
- **Long** -- Dam. 5d+1, SS 14, Acc 10, 1/2D 800, Max. 3,800, Wt. 5, \$300, Holdout -4

Stocks (pick one)

- **No stock** -- SS +1, Acc -3, Wt. 0, \$0, Holdout 0
- **Folding Stock** -- Wt. 2, \$100, Holdout -1 (-2 when unfolded)
- **Solid Stock** -- Wt. 1.5, \$50, Holdout -2
- **Adjustable Stock** -- SS+1, Acc +1, Wt. 4, \$200, Holdout -3

Actions (pick one)

- **Semiautomatic** -- Acc +1, RoF 3~, Wt. 3, ST 9, Rcl. -1, \$100, Holdout -1
- **Full Automatic (standard)** -- RoF 10*, Wt. 4, ST 9, Rcl -1, \$200, Holdout -1
- **Full Automatic (sustained fire)** -- SS+1, RoF 15*, Wt. 8, ST 13, Rcl -1, \$500, Holdout -1

Magazines (pick one)

- **5-round box** -- Awt. 0.4, Shots 5+1

- **30-round box** -- Awt. 1.0, Shots 30+1
- **100-round drum** -- Awt. 3.4, Shots 100+1, Holdout -2
- **50-round belt** -- Awt. 1.0, Shots 50 (Must have sustained fire action), Holdout -1
- **100-round belt** -- Awt. 2.1, Shots 100 (Must have sustained fire action), Holdout -2

Accessories

- **4× Scope** -- Acc +2, Wt. 1, \$500
- **Bayonet** -- Treat as Large Knife, Wt. 1, \$25
- **Bipod** -- ST -1 when on bipod (ie, ST 13 becomes ST 12B), Wt. 1.5, \$150
- **Tripod** -- ST is ignored when on tripod, ST +5 otherwise, Wt. 20, \$450, Holdout n/a
- **M-203 Grenade Launcher** -- As per GURPS High-Tech. Must have standard barrel.

For example, let's make a Stoner M-65 Sniper Rifle. It is built from a long barrel, adjustable stock, semiautomatic action, 5-round magazine, 4× scope, and bipod. It therefore has Malf. crit, Dam. 5d+1, SS 15, Acc 12+2, 1/2D 800, Max. 3,800, Wt. 14.5, Awt. 0.4, RoF 3~, Shots 5+1, Cost \$1,450, ST 8B, Rcl. -1, Holdout -8. Compared to the H&K PSG1, it is lighter, cheaper, and more accurate -- but at the cost of range, power, and size. Of course, this is counterbalanced by the increased versatility.

Weapons Table

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
M-1 Pederson, 7mm Ped., Guns(Rfl)	crit	Cr	6d+2	14	11	900	4,400	9	0.6	3~	10+1	\$100	11	-2	6
H&K M-20, 4.7mmC, Guns(LtAu)	ver	Cr	5d+1	12	11	600	4,000	10	1.4	10**	2×50	\$1,000	10	-	7
AAI M-20, 5.56×45mm, Guns(LtAu)	crit	--	--	12	10	--	--	11	--	10**	30+1	\$1,000	10	-1	7
<i>Flechette Rounds</i>		Imp	2d			200	1,000		1.4						
<i>Duplex Rounds</i>		Cr	2× 2d+1			500	3,800		1.0						
Vorwerk MG12, 7.92mm Mauser, Gunner(MG)	ver	Cr	7d+1	19	11	800	4,000	41/72	40	22	2×192	\$500	18T	-1	6
FN M-250, 15.5mm FN, Gunner(MG)	ver	--	--	20	16	--	--	86/120	--	10	100	\$5,000	30T	-1	7
<i>Solid Rounds</i>		Cr	14d+			1,500	37,000		70						
<i>API Rounds</i>		Cr	14d+(2)			1,500	7,000		70						
<i>APS Rounds</i>		Cr	6d×3(2)			2,200	10,500		47						
<i>APFSDS Rounds</i>		Cr	6d×5(2)	17		2,200	14,400		47						
MAT48, 9×19mm, Guns(LtAu)	crit	Cr	3d-1	10	6	160	1,900	7.5	1.5	11*	32	\$250	10	-1	6

References

- Hogg, Ian and John Weeks (2000): *Military Small Arms of the 20th Century, 7th Edition*. Krause, Iola. A great source of information on just about every firearm used by a military force between 1901 and 2000. Notable for some odd omissions, such as the U.S. M-4 Carbine. Particularly useful to the alternate worlds GM for the large number of experimental guns detailed.
- Miller, David (2000): *The Illustrated Book of Guns*. Salamander, San Diego. A "coffee-table" sized hardcover filled with pictures and stats for hundreds of firearms. Now in its second printing, which corrects several errors and omissions. Again, this book includes many experimental and homemade weapons.

Clay Allison

by Wes Allison

Clay Allison

126 1/2 points

Age 42; 5'9"; 150 lbs.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 14 [45]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 11 [10].

Speed 6.25; Move 6.

Dodge 7; Parry 9.

Damage: Smith & Wesson Russian cr 2d; Punch: 1d-4; Kick: 1d-2; Thrust 1d-2; Swing 1d.

Advantages: Collected [5] (Fright Check: 20); Combat Reflexes [15] (Fright Check: 20); Charisma +1 [5] (Reaction: +1); Fearlessness +5 [10] (Fright Check: 20); Manual Dexterity 2 [6].

Disadvantages: Reputation -3 [-15] (Reaction: -3); Alcoholism [-15]; Bloodlust [-10]; Bad Temper [-10].

Quirks: Club Foot. [-1]

Skills: Animal Handling-12 [8]; Area Knowledge-13 [6]; Carousing-10 [1]; Gambling-10 [2]; Riding (Horse)-16 [8]; Teamster-8 [1/2]; Fast-Draw-18 [8]; Guns (Pistol)/TL5-19 [16]; Intimidation-12 [6]; Guns (Rifle)/TL5-16 [2]; Gunner (Cannon)/TL5-14 [1]; Knife-18 [16] (Parry: 9); Law-10 [4]; Leadership-10 [1]; Tactics-9 [2].

Equipment: Saddle horse (ST 35, DX 9, IQ 4, HT 14, Move 12; 1200 lbs.; \$1,200; Ordinary riding horse); Boots (PD 2, DR 2; 3 lbs.; \$80); Smith & Wesson Russian (cr 2d, Skill: 19; 2 1/2 lbs.; \$20; SS: 10; Acc: 3; Half DMG: 150; MAX: 1700; RoF: 1; Shots: 6; ST: 10; Rcl: -2; TL: 5; .44R, US, 1871).

Biography

Clay Allison, the Wolf of Washita, was without a doubt one of the most colorful characters in the Old West. He saw himself as an honorable man and a cattle rancher. Others saw him as a psychopathic killer.

Robert Clay Allison was born September 2, 1841 in Tennessee. Clay's father John Allison, a Presbyterian minister, died when he was five. Clay worked the family farm, where he may have sustained a head injury, sometimes blamed for his erratic behavior.

When the Civil War broke out, Allison joined the Tennessee Light Artillery of the Confederate Army. He was promoted to corporal, but began to exhibit signs of violence and unpredictability. During one battle, he threatened to kill his commanding officer when he would not go after retreating Union troops. This, and several other incidents, led to his medical discharge, which noted, "emotional or physical excitement produces paroxysmal of a mixed character, partly epileptic and partly maniacal." When a Union soldier arrived at the Allison farm to confiscate property, Clay Allison calmly walked to the cupboard, took out his gun, and killed the "yellow-belly." Allison later reenlisted as a scout, and some say a spy, for Nathan Bedford Forrest until the end of the war, when he was a prisoner of war for seven days.

After the war, Allison, his two brothers, his sister, and his brother-in-law, moved to Texas. From 1866 to 1870, Clay seemed to settle down, working as a cowboy for several prominent ranchers, at last receiving payment of 300 head to start his own ranch. At least, he was settled down for Clay Allison. One evening, he and several drinking buddies stampeded a herd of Army mules as a prank. During the escapade, Allison accidentally shot himself in the foot. On

another occasion, he brutally beat a ferry owner who tried to overcharge him. When he had a property line dispute with a neighbor named Johnson, the two agreed to settle it by having a knife fight to the death in a freshly-dug grave.

In October 1870, Clay Allison led a group of vigilantes in Elizabethtown, New Mexico to arrest Charles Kennedy, who had allegedly killed his own daughter. When the allegations proved correct, Allison led the same group back to the jail. They knocked out the deputies and dragged Kennedy to the slaughterhouse, where he was lynched and beheaded. According to legend, Allison put the head on a pole and rode with it to the local saloon.

A similar event happened five year later, when a suspected murderer named Cruz Vega was lynched. Allison may or may not have been leading the gang, but he did admit to "putting the Mex out of his misery" by shooting him in the back while he dangled in the noose. Two days later, Vega's son and two of his friends, one a notorious gunman named Pancho Griego, confronted Allison at the St. James Hotel in Cimarron, Texas. Griego hid a drawn pistol behind his sombrero, but Allison saw his hand in motion and -- in classic quick draw style -- gunned him down. Reports differ as to whether he stared down the other two adversaries or beat a hasty retreat out the back.

Clay Allison's most famous encounter was his gunfight with "Chunk" Colbert. Colbert was a desperado. Why he sought out Allison is unknown; he may have been the nephew of the ferry owner Allison had beaten, or he may have been out for another notch on his pistol (he had killed seven men prior to the meeting). When Chunk encountered Clay on January 7, 1874, Clay invited him for a drink. The two spent most of the day together, horse-racing, carousing, and drinking. The two men sat down to supper, Clay with his gun on the table, Colbert with his cocked and in his lap. Midway through the meal, Colbert reached for Clay's gun with his left hand while pulling his own with his right. Unfortunately for him, the barrel of Colbert's pistol snagged on the table and fired into the floor. Allison reached his own gun and shot Colbert in the head. When reporters asked Allison why he had dined before a shootout, Allison replied, "I didn't want to send him to hell on an empty stomach."

On December 21, 1876, Clay Allison and his brother John arrived in Las Animas, Colorado after a trail drive. After visiting all the saloons in town, they stopped at the local dancehall to dance with some unwilling partners. When Constable Charles Faber arrived to check out the disturbance, Allison tried to dance with him too. After realizing whom he was dealing with, Faber left and returned with two deputized townsmen. As he reentered the dancehall, he emptied his shotgun into the nearest Allison. Unfortunately for him, it was John. Clay turned and fired his pistol, killing Faber. The two deputies fled. Clay was arrested, but the charges were dropped on the grounds of self-defense. John Allison eventually recovered.

On July 1, 1878, Clay Allison was returning to his ranch with a wagonload of supplies. He had probably been drinking. He fell from the wagon and the back wheel rolled over him, breaking his neck and almost decapitating him.

Clay Allison In History

Though not a pivotal figure in history himself, Clay Allison was present in a number of exciting moments in western history. He rode with Nathan Bedford Forrest in the Civil War. As a cowboy, he helped open up several trails from Texas to Kansas and New Mexico. When he rode into Dodge City, it is said that lawman Bat Masterson rode out the other way. On another occasion in Dodge, he was confronted by Wyatt Earp. This time, it is said, it was Allison's turn to back down. If he did back down, it was the only time. All Earp had to say on the subject was that he had "questioned" Allison about a murder.

Several recent Westerns have portrayed Clay Allison, usually as a bandit or a rather generic villain. This is definitely not the Clay Allison that actually existed. When drunk or excited, he was dangerous, violent, and sadistic. But he never robbed anyone. When a newspaper editorial listed him as a killer of fifteen men, he wrote an editorial response, saying: "I have at all times tried to use my influence toward protecting the property holders and substantial men of the country from thieves, outlaws, and murderers, among whom I do not care to be classed." He did not consider himself a villain at all, but a "shootist", a term that he coined. He also never bragged about his duels. Several men who rode out to gun down Clay Allison were never seen again, but Clay countered, "I never killed a man who didn't need it."

Encountered

Clay Allison can be a great addition to any Old West campaign. By all accounts a good friend, a loving husband to his wife Dora, and father to two daughters, Allison will turn violent at any provocation. Any offence against him will carry serious consequences. Once when a dentist drilled the wrong tooth, Allison pressed him down into the dentist chair and pulled out one of the dentist's own. Though not particularly considerate himself, especially when drinking, he nevertheless considers himself a gentleman, and he will seek his own vigilante justice, should anyone harm a lady. His greatest violence will be reserved for anyone harming a little girl (perhaps remembering his two daughters).

What If?

Clay Allison would work well in a weird west game. Why was he so maniacal? Was it really a blow to the head that caused his bouts of violence and sadism, or was it something else? Did he see something he wasn't meant to see, or was there something inside of him, forcing him to acts of viciousness? Why was he so hard to kill? In a dozen or more confrontations, the only wound Allison received was from his own gun. Was it simply coincidence that the injury that killed him, left him almost decapitated in the road... perhaps at a crossroads?

On the other hand, it may be that Clay Allison's actions were misunderstood. He never harmed the innocent, did he? Perhaps his violence was necessary against certain unholy minions, and only seemed unpredictable and sadistic to those on the outside, blissfully unaware of those things that hide just beyond the veil of our reality.

For an old west character tossed into some other plane of existence, one just couldn't ask for a better choice. It is unlikely that Clay Allison would be unduly troubled finding himself in another century or plane of existence. One could imagine him shrugging his shoulders and joining the fray against orcs, martians, or twenty-third century Yankees.

"It was a time of great troubles. They needed hope. They needed a hero. What they got was . . . Clay Allison." <*dun dun DUN*>

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Arm of Decision

An Alternate Setting for *Battletech*

by Alexander Shearer

War in *Battletech* is characterized by diversity. Force compositions are not at all uniform, and there is nothing strange about opposing houses facing off with hodgepodge armies that share more units than they differ by. This is pretty cool, for gamers. You can field whatever you want, not limited by force lists or historical availability. Ultimate variety is a lot of fun.

Of course, it makes no military sense. No army would choose to field everything under the sun, and any army that tried to would lose in a big way. Imagine the multiplicative difficulty of stocking enough ammunition for twenty different makes of autocannon, then multiply that across every machine component that likely wouldn't match from 'mech to 'mech. It's irrational to imagine that kind of mess would ever work.

But then, *Battletech* is firmly rooted in the irrational. Twelve-meter battle robots are undeniably a bad idea when a tank would do just fine. Battles take place at incredibly short range, even considering the technological loss inherent to the background (though see "[Age of Ares](#)" for one fix for this). The sheer concept of a battalion or regiment of 'mechs conquering a planet as if it were a small midwestern town is silly. *Battletech* tosses all this into the mix and still comes out as an entertaining game where you can apply basic tactics and end up with reasonable results. Why bother tinkering with that by making the House militaries more plausible?

Chiefly, because it adds a kind of character *Battletech* lacks. The hodgepodge can be cool, but it's also a lot of fun to know that while the Davion Jagermech, Rifleman, and Marauder all chamber the same ammunition for their AC/5s, none of them could reload from a captured Kurita Dragon, so there's no point trying to salvage one. Limited force selection also makes for more creative game play. Faced with a situation where jump-capable scouts would be the easy way out, a Marik commander must instead be creative and make do with Locusts. And in a game with roleplaying elements, mechwarriors will have some degree of crosstraining in the 'mechs their House fields, but if they end up in a foreign design, they'll suffer under fire until they figure things out.

Presented below are rules suggestions for playing *Battletech* games and campaigns in which each House fields a defined range of units. Though written for the Third Succession War era (*Technical Readout 3025*), the idea can easily be used for later ones. The most important thing to keep in mind in maintaining the flavor of defined force selection is to happily toss out the proliferation of units that comes with each new *Technical Readout*. If you find that after some play with more limited units, you crave a bit more variety (but not too much, or you should just go play regular *Battletech*), start including various optional load variants of the normal House units. This nicely mirrors what real militaries do, and lets you come up with cool names for each variant.

The (Alternate) Historical Background

The time right before the collapse of the Star League was one of massive, if semicovert, militarization. Though denied the cutting edge of Star League military technology, the House armies bulked up with downgraded versions of Regular Army 'mechs, as well as funding additional R&D to make their own. Wary in the extreme, the House Lords purchased 'mechs almost entirely from factories within their own territories. When the fall came, these facilities were instantly annexed, and modern House armies are the fallout of this geographical lottery. While few of the factories have survived, their legacy is visible in the 'mechs each House army comprises.

At the end of this article, 'mechs found in each House army are listed, along with notes on mercenaries and bandit kings. While the lists do acknowledge 'mechs that are canonically associated with a given House (for example, Davion's Valkyrie), they may differ from later publications that list where one factory or another existed. You can play

with the concepts described in this article with your own force lists, of course. The ones below were made to try and make sure no House was left in the cold, and to fit 'mechs to the character of each House.

Tooth, Meet Tail: Maintenance

It is assumed that, back when people understood how to design and retool factories, every effort was made to ensure cross-compatibility between units in any given House Army. As a result, ammunition of the same type (e.g. AC/5 ammunition, as mentioned above) can be swapped freely between units belonging to the same House. The same is not true of ammunition from other House militaries. It can't even be jury-rigged. Beyond ammunition, equipment is not even completely compatible between units within a House army. Thus, even though they share ammo, the AC/5 from a Davion Marauder can not be used to replace an AC/5 in a Davion Rifleman.

All is not lost, however. There is sufficient compatibility within any army that an item of equipment from one 'mech can be used to assist in fixing a similar damaged component in another. Cannibalizing a component in this manner effectively damages it with a number of critical hits equal to the amount being fixed on the component to be repaired. For example, a Steiner 'tech needs to fix a badly-damaged (two critical hits) LRM-15 on a Zeus. He strips parts from the LRM-15 on a Crusader, effectively damaging it for two critical hits. Of course, if he had a spare Zeus LRM-15, he could simply swap it in and fix the damaged one at his leisure.

Cannibalizing parts in this manner is worth a -2 to the repair target number for the damaged component in question. A tech attempting to use parts from an enemy House for the same operation receives a +2 to the target number. Note that the difficulties listed in the Battletech rules are here assumed to be for a tech with access to material, but perhaps not the entire component in question (which would allow a simple replacement). When Houses share a unit (e.g. the Marauder) parts may be swapped freely. It is assumed that techs on both sides have learned how to work around the quirky differences that have developed over the years.

Trained From Birth

'Mechs are rare and valuable units; in some cases, the right to pilot a given 'mech is passed down within a family, and losing the family 'mech in battle is a great tragedy. Even in less feudal parts of the Successor States' militaries, the irreplaceable nature of most 'mechs means that pilot training is very focused, to ensure that pilots know their particular 'mech inside and out. The practical result of this is that the typical pilot, even with simulator time, is not effectively cross-trained in other 'mechs. Mechwarriors piloting a unit of a class other than their own, but that is used in their House army, suffer a +1 to target numbers for both Piloting and Gunnery. This penalty can be overcome with substantial real piloting experience, the equivalent of a year-long training program, or a long battlefield campaign.

The situation is worse for pilots forced to operate 'mechs their house does not field. A run-of-the-mill mechwarrior who finds himself stuck in a foreign unit suffers a +2 to target numbers for both Piloting and Gunnery. Extensive familiarization, as above, can remove this penalty. Note, however, that the penalty can never go below +1 if a mechwarrior has to pilot a unit with displays in a language in which she is not fluent. In the Third Succession war era, the only mechwarriors who will have a chance to become familiar with foreign units are deep cover espionage agents and members of the Davion and Steiner militaries in liaison positions within the opposite nation.

Bandit and mercenary pilots generally suffer only a +1 penalty for unfamiliar units. Having no house and tending to switch 'mechs from time to time, they have an easier time getting used to new things.

The Armies of the Inner Sphere

Each entry below discusses the 'mechs available to the House army in question. 'Mechs are split by weight class. Those marked with a (P) are still being produced during the Third Succession War period. For those with a new edition *Technical Readout 3025*, the units in parentheses are suggested as replacements for the units that were removed.

House Davion

An economic powerhouse, House Davion has always fielded armies that rely heavily on missiles and autocannons. In the modern era, it is also the only actively producing more than one 'mech design, and with a reasonable hope of designing new ones. Davion commanders are not shy about expending ammunition. They also tend to throw Valkyries and Enforcers into lead positions, considering them another expendable resource.

- **Light:** Javelin, Stinger (Thorn), Valkyrie (P)
- **Medium:** Blackjack, Dervish, Enforcer (P)
- **Heavy:** Jagermech, Rifleman (Lancelot), Marauder (Black Knight)
- **Assault:** Atlas, Victor

House Kurita

Governed by their modern form of Bushido, Kurita mechwarriors prefer to pilot units that can comfortably engage enemy 'mechs one on one. As such, their medium 'mechs are actually the least favored in combat, with choice assignments going to units made of mixed fast scouts and slow heavies.

- **Light:** Jenner, Panther, Wasp (Mongoose)
- **Medium:** Hunchback, Phoenix Hawk (Kintaro), Vulcan, Whitworth
- **Heavy:** Archer (Bombardier), Dragon (P), Grand Dragon (P), Warhammer (Guillotine)
- **Assault:** Battlemaster (Crockett)

House Liao

Perennially on the short end of everything, Liao suffers from a limited force selection. Even so, it has the advantage of a decent heavy and a mass-produced medium 'mech. Especially as Davion forces encroach on their space, House Liao sends more and more cadres of Vindicators out to bolster local defenses, reserving other units for hard targets and critical engagements.

- **Light:** Firestarter, Wasp (Hermes)
- **Medium:** Vindicator (P), Wolverine (Wyvern)
- **Heavy:** Catapult, Marauder (Black Knight)
- **Assault:** Cyclops, Goliath (King Crab)

House Marik

Slow and steady, Marik forces rely on a mix of medium and heavy 'mechs to get the job done. Having only one scout platform to work with, House Marik has made perhaps the most variants of any single 'mech in the Inner Sphere. Marik forces fight conservatively, both because of the nature of their units and because of the factionalism and unease within the House.

- **Light:** Locust (Mercury)
- **Medium:** Centurion, Hermes II, Trebuchet
- **Heavy:** Orion, Ostroc, Ostsol, Quickdraw
- **Assault:** Awesome, Stalker

House Steiner

The Lyran Commonwealth specializes in heavy assault, favoring hard-hitting direct attacks spearheaded by tough mediums and backed up by heavies and the infamous Zeus, the only assault 'mech still in production. Steiner commanders are the least subtle in the Inner Sphere, and the most likely to take casualties and to completely crush their opponents.

- **Light:** Commando, Stinger (Thorn)
- **Medium:** Griffin (Wyvern), Hatchetman (P), Shadow Hawk (Crab)
- **Heavy:** Crusader (Bombardier), Thunderbolt (Exterminator)
- **Assault:** Banshee, Zeus (P)

Rare Units

Some of these were specialized units developed for the old Regular Army. Others were simply never made in great quantities, or never adopted by House armies. Some, like the Urbanmech, show up frequently in militias, and are maintained out of local stocks of supplies. The Houses hoard their last handful of Ostscouts and Spiders, saving them for special occasions when high-end scouts and special ops units are needed.

Assassin, Charger, Clint, Grasshopper, Ostscout, Scorpion, Spider, Urbanmech

Mercenaries

Modern mercenaries typically have units from one, or at most two, Houses. The most likely 'mechs for such mercs are those that are still in production. Houses are loathe to part with any of the other, irreplaceable ones. Many of the oldest mercenary units are remnants of Regular Army detachments, and as such will have three to five types of 'mechs, frequently in combinations not seen in contemporary House armies. Times being as they are, a number of mercenary units have no choice but to replace lost 'mechs with cheaper, less durable vehicles.

Bandit Kings

Living on the Periphery, bandit kings and minor lords are the third world nations of the Third Succession War. Most often, they bought 'mechs from their nearest House neighbor back when the units were still in production. These 'mechs have typically been maintained since then. The lack of resupply explains why lesser lords are very shy about going into combat. They just can't afford the loss. True bandit kings often have utter hodgepodge forces, frequently in very poor states of repair.

Where Are The Other Units?

Classic *Battletech* relegates vehicles to ancillary support roles. As such, just how to divide the currently available vehicle designs, from *Technical Readout 3026* and elsewhere, has been left to the reader.

Owners of the original *Technical Readout 3025* can refer to that book for the aerospace fighters fielded by each House.

Notes

Even if you can't find the first edition of *Technical Readout 3025*, the game information for all the removed units is available in *Battletech Record Sheets: 3025 & 3026*, which can frequently be found in discount racks these days.

Fans of *Battletech* should look to www.fanpro.com and www.classicbattletech.com for continuing support of the original *Battletech* game, and www.wizkidsgames.com for the new *Mechwarrior: Darkage* clickbase game.

Pyramid Review

Gregory Horror Show Gregory Horror Show Boosters

Gregory Horror Show

Published by [Upper Deck](#)
[Entertainment](#)

**Basic Set Price: \$14.99 Expansion Pack Price:
\$3.99**

Gregory Horror Show is a game for two to four players that describes itself as a Collectible Game Experience, though it only becomes collectible with the addition of the expansion packs. In its most basic form, the players take the roles of characters who have stopped at Gregory House after a long day's travel. They appear to be the only guests at the hotel, the sole other occupant being a somewhat misshapen mouse caretaker named Gregory. Alarmed at the mysterious wails and screams around them, the characters decide that this is not the best place to stay . . . but before they can make it to the door, the mouse informs them that once entered, it is impossible to leave Gregory House! Well, not quite *impossible* . . . if they can take control of three hotel rooms and make it to the door, then they can escape. Roaming the halls and trying to stop the guests is Gregory himself, and, as the players will discover, there are other hotel guests who dislike being disturbed in their hotel rooms.

The game comes in a small thick box, containing:

- A deck of 90 game cards comprised of thirty Judgment cards, 48 Monster cards, and 12 Mystery Room cards
- A 22" × 16" full-color Gregory House game mat
- Four guest game pieces
- One 20-sided die
- A perforated sheet of Death-o-Meter, Spooky Strength, Skeleton Key, and Room Control icons
- A 42-page 4-1/4" by 5-1/2" full-color saddle stitched House Rules booklet
- One Roaming Monster piece (Gregory himself)

The square-grided map shows the rooms and halls of Gregory House; it contains a large ground floor, and a much smaller first floor only accessible by either one set of stairs or from Hell (which also lies on the first floor). Room Control squares can only be found in hotel rooms, whereas the Trap spaces and Trigger squares only come into play in the advanced game. On each side of the game mat are the same set of three tables: the Death-o-Meter, which measures a guest's Life Points; a power meter, which measures the guest's Spooky Strength; and a movement point table.

All of the cards are of a quality befitting a manufacturer such as Upper Deck, and add to the atmosphere of the game. The black Judgment cards clearly state when they may be played and what effect they have. These include altering player and monster movement, various fight effects, and forcing the other players to drop all of their Judgment cards or their Skeleton Keys. A favorite is the Nature Calls card, which is illustrated with a picture of a water closet and automatically ends an opponent's turn when played. The Mystery cards can only be brought into play when a guest enters the Mystery Room; unlike when guests enter Hotel Rooms, no Skeleton Key is required to do this. The Mystery cards tend to have lingering effects, such as allowing a player to move diagonally in addition to normal movement, unlocking all doors for that player, or even turning the Rug spaces into damage dealing sewers! Such effects will last until another player can enter the Mystery Room and turn over a new card, or until a Judgment card cancels it.

The Monster cards come in four identical 12-card decks, one per player. They each depict two Monsters, one large and one small, so that all of the advanced game's Monsters appear on the cards. Each card has the Monster's strength and any special abilities, which come into play in the advanced game, and a victory table at the bottom of the card, which is rolled on when a guest defeats the Monster.

Gregory Mouse is the only Roaming Monster piece included in the basic game; more can be added with the Expansion Packs. He stands an inch high, and is molded in durable plastic and detailed in full color. All of the miniatures in *Gregory Horror Show* are sculpted in a very square fashion, and Gregory Mouse is no exception. His look is rather creepy, though the miniatures in the Expansion Packs tend towards a more bloodied, ghoulish appearance.

Players begin the game with 800 Life Points and 250 Spooky Strength points, which are marked on the two tables with the appropriate colored icons. Each player also receives an identical deck of 12 Monster cards placed face in front, plus two Judgment cards. The Mystery cards are shuffled, and five dealt face down into the Mystery Room with the remainder discarded for the game. Each guest piece is placed on the entrance.

On a turn, a player rolls the die against the movement table to gain between two and five movement points. These can be expended to move either the player's piece or a monster up to the total number rolled, horizontally or vertically (not diagonally). Movement points can also be split between the guest piece and the monster. A player will usually move the guest piece onto a beneficial square, end its movement there, and use any remainder to move the Roaming Monster towards another player's piece. If a guest piece is moved onto a Spooky Strength Power Up square, the player gets more Power Meter points. The player also ends the guest piece's movement there, and on the next turn must go to another Power Up square or a Hotel Room before returning to any Spooky Strength Power Up space. The Judgment Power Up squares work in the same fashion, but allow the player to draw a Judgment card up to a maximum hand of five. Skeleton Key squares only have to be moved through to gain a key that will open any Hotel Room (all of which are locked), although a player can only hold one Skeleton Key at a time. Portals allow a guest to teleport to another Portal without stopping; Thorn squares reduce a guest's Life Points if he passes through or lands on them; Rug areas allow a player to discard a Judgment card.

A player with a Skeleton Key can rush to the nearest Hotel Room, unlock the door, and, once inside, attempt to take control of it. These rooms can be uncontrolled or even controlled by another player; to win control, the player must defeat the monster lurking inside. The monster is determined by turning over the top card of the attempting player's Monster Deck and expending a number of Spooky Strength points equal to that of the Monster's. These Spooky Strength points are lost, but the guest gets to eat the defeated Monster and gain an equal number of Life Points. The player may also take control of the room and mark its Control Square with the player's colored icon. Additionally, victorious players can roll on the victory conditions table at the bottom of the Monster Card, which can give them more Judgment cards, Spooky Strength, or Life Points, or allow them to move another player or the Roaming Monster.

If the player lacks sufficient Spooky Strength, the guest loses Life Points equal to the strength of the Monster and must leave the room. Fighting Gregory Mouse, the only Roaming Monster in the basic game, is slightly different. To determine his strength, the die is rolled against the movement table and the result multiplied by a hundred! Successfully defeating Gregory Mouse or another Roaming Monster in the advanced game does not gain players any direct benefits, but defeated players not only lose Life Points, but are also sent to the much tougher first floor.

The basic game is won when a player has gained control of three rooms and manages to flee to the entrance, or is the last guest still standing. It is a simple game, which becomes quite fun when the Judgment cards start flying. That said, the game does have a familiar feel about it, as if it has been played somewhere before. This may well be a deterrent for some, but it does make the game easy to pick up and begin. Overall, the feel and look of the game are enhanced by the decent quality of the components, though the paper map offsets this.

To add that collectible element to *Gregory Horror Show*, one only needs to purchase one or more Expansion Packs. Each of these contains not cards, but a pair of Feral Monster miniatures. There are some twenty-five of these to collect, including one rare: the Mono-Eye Wizard. Descriptive details of all these Feral Monsters can be found on the reverse of the game mat, along with a full color illustration of each. They are all done in the same style as the Gregory Mouse figure found in the basic set, but more so! This means that they have a gleefully ghoulish look to them, so that those so inclined might find them cute.

In the two expansion packs purchased for the review, there were four figures: Bonehead, who, possessed by an enchanted dinosaur bone, seeks out victims to fossilize; the fan-wielding Bonsai Kabuki, who has a miniature tree growing out of his head and a mystic third eye; Sleepy Sheep, a pajama-wearing ram who invades the dreams of

others; and Dr. Fritz, the hotel's physician, constructed from cadavers. These four are enough to reach the maximum number of Feral Monsters in play at any one time if there are four guests. This maximum drops as the number of players decreases.

Ferals act as extra roaming monsters, but have special abilities; future releases will introduce more abilities. Ferals can be brought into play by two means. The first is when a player loses a battle for control of a room, and the player to the left turns over the next card on the Monster Deck that has a picture corresponding to one of the monster figures in the collection. Since there are two monster illustrations per card, players could get away with using just 12 of the available Feral Monsters to get the most out of the advanced game. With luck they might be able to acquire these twelve with just the purchase of only six expansion packs, rather the minimum of 12 packs to gain all of the Feral Monsters in Gregory Horror Show. Since it is likely that players will have fewer Ferals than this, they can get a Feral of their choosing into play via a Shady Deal. Simply expend Life Points to get a Feral into one of the Trap spaces on the map, and attempt to release it by landing on a Trigger square and rolling the number given on the trap or less. Once released, any player can move a Feral Monster, but only the introducing player can send it into combat . . . even to attack Gregory Mouse!

Gregory Horror Show is an easy game to play at both the basic and the expanded levels. Although the collectible game concept is questionable, this game has the appeal of ghoulishly quirky little monster figures and a reasonable price to get them all. That said, it would still be nice if some Feral Monsters had been included in the basic set. In the end, the decision to expand **Gregory Horror Show** is down to the buyer; there is always the option of the other players sharing the cost and picking up an Expansion Pack or three themselves.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Pick

Squint

Squint



Published by [Out of the Box Publishing, Inc.](#)

Designed by Deborah Boss

Game play by Mark Osterhaus, Ellen Osterhaus, Max Osterhaus

Illustration and Graphic Design by John Kovalic

\$19.95

Some games, once they come out, seem so obvious you wonder why someone didn't think of them before. In the case of *Squint*, from Out of the Box Games, someone sort of did; the game was called *Pictionary*, and it required you to use whatever (usually minimal) artistic skills you had to sketch the clues your teammates needed to guess the right answers.

But you don't draw in this game. There's no pad, pens, or pencils, and you won't hear anyone lamenting, "But I don't know how to draw!" (You'll have to come up with a new excuse.) You still have cards to tell you what you must convey to the other players, but the mechanic is more unusual.

When a player takes his turn, he draws one of the 168 Squint cards. Each card has three items, numbered 1 to 3. The 1 items are fairly straightforward -- beard, hand, car, cat, eye -- and are worth fewer points. 3s are worth more, but are tougher to do: pickle, coffin, adhesive bandage. 2s fall somewhere in the middle. A specialized 6-sided die randomly determines which of the items the player must represent (1s are more likely with the die than 3s). The object of the game is to score points by getting others to guess what is being depicted, but rather than drawing from scratch, the chosen player has to draw the images using tiles from a pool of 72 shape cards.

The shape cards have a variety of figures or images on them, and resemble the Zener cards used to measure psychic abilities. There are straight lines, curved lines, wavy lines, circles, angles, a trident: a solid selection of shapes that ensures the arranger has almost, but not quite, what he needs to finish the job. When he begins putting together the artwork, the hourglass timer gets flipped over. If no one guesses what is being "drawn" before the clock runs out -- about 45 seconds -- no points are awarded. If someone deduces the item, both that person and the arranger get points equal to the numbered item; if the player who's up rolled a 2, he pieced together the number 2 item on the card, and the two successful players get two points each. The game comes with 80 little Tiddlywinks-esque plastic chits to keep track of points.

Each person gets to take a turn at being the artist during a single round. After playing a set number of rounds, everyone adds up the tokens, and whoever has the most tokens wins. If there's a tie, the tied players compete in one more contest to see who can guess a neutral party's attempt at a picture.

The game plays quickly, and the timer runs out very quickly, allowing the group to play several rounds in short order - as little as 10 minutes for a three-player game. Everyone gets to participate at once, which is nice because participants are never sitting around waiting for a turn; however, in larger games many people will be shouting out answers. The shape cards provide a good spread of images, but the game designers knew not to be too generous; most of what an arranger needs is there, but it's a tight enough selection that it'll be a maddening time trying to find something that looks like a pair of cat ears, especially if he has already used the little arrow bumps as the whiskers.

There will also probably be a lot of head shaking as players argue, "High heels is easier to portray than turkey? I think not," but such arguments are inevitable and part of the fun.

The package is good for twenty bucks. The timer is an expense buyers might have preferred not to cover, and the die is specialized while not totally foreign. As an aside, anyone looking for the cute John Kovalic cartoon artwork that characterizes many Out of the Box products needn't bother; this game doesn't really merit them, and the less confusion in the graphics, the better.

Out of the Box has a habit of making games that seem so absurdly simple and straightforward you wonder why someone hasn't done them already. *Squint* is one of those games. It takes a game concept, adds a strange new dimension to it, and comes out with a challenging outlet for creativity that the rest of us might have seen, had we looked at it in a slightly different way.

And, yes, it helps to squint.

--*Andy Vetromile*

The Magickal History, or Historickal Majesty, of Mister Punch

"Ladies and Gentlemen, pray how you do?

If you all happy, me all happy too.

Stop and hear my merry littel play;

If me make you laugh, me need not make you pay."

-- Mister Punch's Prologue, in *The Tragical Comedy, or Comical Tragedy, of Punch and Judy*, as recorded by John Payne Collier (1828)

It's not [Romeo and Juliet](#), even though the death-toll can be the same. It's not [The Waste Land](#), although it, too, takes place in a nihilistic landscape from which divine grace seems uncannily absent. No, it's a work of English literature somehow athwart and akin to both, older and newer than either, and dedicated to the lord of Discord, Mister Punch. Gather round, kids, and watch his comical tragedy unfold. Root-te-oot-toot-toot!

"There are endless variants of these stories of love and loss, of rage and desire and death; the ideas are always cruising around looking for people who will keep them going in one form and another. Punch and Judy are of this class of idea."

-- Russell Hoban, "1975"

Although the play varies greatly depending on the audience, the "professor" (as the puppeteer is called, by those with the proper respect for tradition), and its date of performance, the central story of *Punch and Judy* is as follows. Mister Punch goes to visit his wife, Judy, who asks him to hold the baby while she bakes dumplings; frustrated with the baby's screams, Punch beats its head in and throws it out the window. When Judy confronts him, Punch denies killing the baby, but she sees through his lie and they have a mighty stick-battle, at the end of which Punch kills Judy and throws her out the window, too. Judy's Ghost then appears to Punch and frightens him into a decline; when the Doctor arrives to physic Punch with a stick, however, Punch revives and beats the Doctor to death with his own medicine. Arrested by the Beadle, Punch is taken to be hanged, but tricks the Hangman into hanging himself instead. Having killed Death, Punch boasts that he could kill the Devil, too; the Devil (sometimes in the form of a Crocodile, or using a Crocodile as a servant) appears and drags Punch off to Hell, where the two have a huge fight of stick against pitchfork. Mister Punch is, of course, victorious, and closes the play by announcing that with the Devil dead, "we can now all do as we like." With this uplifting moral established, the children are dismissed.

"Thence with Mr. Salisbury, who I met there, into Covent Garden . . . Thence to see an Italian puppet play that is within the rayles there, which is very pretty, the best that ever I saw, and great resort of gallants. So to the Temple and by water home, and so walk upon the leads, and in the dark there played upon my flageolette, it being a fine still evening, and so to supper and to bed."

-- Samuel Pepys, *Diary*, May 9, 1662

Guardians of Mr. Punch's historic tradition trace his play back to 17th century England, seizing upon the Pepys entry above to establish Punch's birthday as May 9, 1662. Pepys was very fond of the play (probably a rude puppet show by Pietro Gimonde of Bologna), and returned to see "Policinello" or "Polichinelli" on numerous occasions (especially during the year of Plague and Fire, 1666). Mr. Punch was already growing into his English name; Pepys also recalls a test-firing of a cannon called "Punchinello" in 1669, and on April 30 hears "poor people" in Smithfield "call their fat child 'Punch' . . . that word being become a word of common use for all that is thick and short." In the earliest version, Punchinello simply escaped from prison by means of a golden key, and then killed Death and the Devil.

Over the next century, Punchinello became more and more English; his wife Gigone (picked up somewhere in France between Naples and Covent-Garden) became first "Joan" then "Judy". Mister Punch added a hobby-horse (that quintessentially English artifact) to his repertoire, which sometimes replaced the Ghost as the cause of his illness. Another Italian, Giovanni Piccini, is generally credited as putting the story into its modern lines around 1785, giving

Punch the hat of his commedia cousin Harlequin, and most importantly, transforming the show from marionette theater to glove-puppets, complete with Punch's famous, deadly "slap-stick."

Others found their way into Mr. Punch's "castello": a Turk named Shaballaha (who could only say "Shaballaha" to Mr. Punch's insults and queries), an "Abyssinian" named Jim Crow who functioned as servant and scapegoat for Mr. Punch's schemes, and for a time a Chinese Boxer. Punch gained the clown Joey as a sidekick and foil (named for Joey Grimaldi, the greatest of the Regency clowns), and the two worked up a lovely bit of madness involving a bell and a plate of sausages that played on the noisy London mob's distaste for landlords and Radicals alike. A dog, Toby, turns up and bites Mr. Punch's nose; many Punchmen -- by now including Gypsies and Englishmen along with the Italian "Professori" -- used a real dog for the part. In one or another form, Piccini's Punch show survives to this day.

"The tale of Mister Punch isn't but only a puppet show, y'see. There's some that say it was old Porsini who carried Punch to England, two, three hundred years ago. And it's true as far as it goes. Mister Punch got his name then. He changed his name, as the times change. But ah, I was following him around back in the dawn days, in the winter's time."

-- "Mr. Swatchell," in *The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Mr. Punch: A Romance*, by Neil Gaiman (1995)

And it extends back farther than that; Pepys' diary (and a watercolor by Lichery from 1688) shows that Mr. Punch is unequivocally Polcinella, "the little chicken," from the Italian commedia dell'arte, which pushes his origins to the 14th or 15th century at least. Polcinella (Punch) and Arlecchino ([the Harlequin](#)) share much in common, but Punch is more capable and cruel than Harlequin can manage. In thousands and thousands of performances for three centuries, Punch and his mates intricately rattled through iteration after iteration of the commedia tales of love and violence, perhaps attempting by sheer permutational magic to achieve some kabbalistic ritual dramaturgy. The commedia characters returned once Mister Punch had won his beachhead in England: Scaramouch the duelist is one of Punch's victims (and occasionally the original owner of Toby), il Dottore becomes the foolish Doctor, Pantalone may be the Landlord, and surely Joey the Clown is Harlequin attempting to complete the ritual pairing. Of course, [Twelfth Night](#) can be seen as another attempt by the commedia to gain a beachhead in Britain, with the Fool Feste as the harbinger of Mr. Punch.

The other odd dramatic parent of Mister Punch's tale is the mystery play tradition; now-outdated scholarship once held that "Punch and Judy" descended from the mystery play "Pontius and Judas" -- with Mr. Punch the heir to the office of Pontius Pilate. Punch, however, more closely resembles Pilate's victim, complete with trickery at his execution and the harrowing of Hell. Other scholars try to place the Crocodile and other aspects of Punch's Opera in the tradition of the "St. George and the Dragon" mysteries, also quite popular in England. It is interesting that Mr. Punch's official "birthday," May 9, is the day after the Feast of St. Michael Defeating Lucifer -- and come the end times, St. Michael will defeat the Great Dragon again, just like his Earthly avatar Mr. Punch does all summer by the seaside.

"Our speaking instrument is an unknown secret, cos it's an 'unknown tongue,' that's known to one except those in our own purfession. It's a hinstrument like this which I has in my hand, and it's tuned to music. We has two or three kinds, one for out-doors, one for in-doors, one for speaking, one for singing, and one that's good for nothing, except selling on the cheap. They ain't whistles, but 'calls,' or 'unknown tongues'; and with them in the mouth we can pronounce each word as plain a parson, and with as much affluency."

-- A Punchman 'professor' as recorded in *London Labour and the London Poor*, by Henry Mayhew (1851)

And in fact, Mr. Punch's birthday falls directly on the Roman Feast of Lemuria, when one drives ghosts out of one's house to prevent them killing the babies within -- which echoes both Mr. Punch's infanticidal habits and his justified fear of Judy's Ghost later in the play. Other Roman influences mark Mr. Punch; he has much in common with the drunken, hook-nosed, potbellied hunchback Dossenus or Mandacus from the Atellan farces of classical Roman theater, and surviving images of Mandacus show a startling resemblance to even the modern Mr. Punch (taking him back to the first century B.C. at least). Atella is, in fact, quite near Naples, the ancestral home of Polcinella -- and thus near Avernus and one of the classical entrances to Hell.

Such proximity to Hell invokes both the resurrected [Dionysos](#), lord of Misrule out of India, and Hermes, the psychopomp trickster god worshiped on the Nile as Thoth. As drunkard and liar, Mr. Punch valiantly seeks to encompass both deities; in our post-Olympian age, both Jung and Picasso recognized Mr. Punch as a god in himself, a

trickster figure who defeats Death at every turn. Punch as archetype calls into relief the other floating images of the Tarot that follow him through the play: not only the Devil, the Beadle's Justice, and the Hangman's Death, but the Blind Man as the Hermit, the Moon (Scaramouche's old symbol), and of course the Tower with its three tiny figures falling from the windows. Even Punch's castello, which rolls around on a cart when not in use, could be the Chariot -- and the two beasts on the Fool card are the Crocodile (native to both India and Egypt) and the Dog. Judy might be the Empress, or more likely Temperance, given her dislike for Mr. Punch.

*"The Devil's dead, there's no more Hell
To all the damned does this bode well.
If you be good and pure of heart
You'd best lie low as things get hot.
Now being bad is thing to do
If you be good, then flames swat you
Tell all the evil hearts to sing gay
'Tis now and forever Mister Punch's Day."*

-- Christopher P. Reilly, *The Comical Tragedy of Punch and Judy* (2002)

The great caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson, in a watercolor of 1785, depicts the progress of King George III to Deptford -- but everyone in the crowd is watching "Punches Opera" instead. Is Rowlandson hinting that Mr. Punch is, in fact, the True King? Does Mr. Punch's murderous arrival in [ghost-haunted](#) London prefigure the Empire's extension to Egypt and India, his ancient homes as Hermes-Dionysos, and the mythical and actual homes of his Gypsy servants? Is Mr. Punch in fact the Emperor, ruling the world from his canvas palace in Covent-Garden? With his hobby-horse and enormous nose, Mr. Punch has much of the True King's fertility regalia, and he does "die" and get "reborn" repeatedly. This may be the true meaning of the Punchman's enigmatic statement recorded by Mayhew, "It was the old ancient style; the sentence is passed upon him, but by whom not known; he's not tried by one person, cos nobody can't." The Punchman Percy Press has been quoted as saying that "Punch is so old he can't die. He's a law unto himself." Is Punch, in the "old ancient style" killing the Devil to become Lord of the World? Perhaps the Punch and Judy plays continue some millennia-old ritual, trying infinite variations until one performance unlocks the golden key to the Great Work -- and it becomes now and forever, Mister Punch's Day. That's the way to do it!

" . . . To Have An Invisible Monster"

Poltergeists for Call of Cthulhu

by J. Edward Tremlett

Mysterious and frightening, even in this age, the unquiet spirits known as poltergeists have left a wide range of fact, myth, rumor and scientific controversy in their wake. A determined group of *Call of Cthulhu* investigators in search of unknown mysteries to solve could spend lifetimes trying to unravel the nature of poltergeists. And, given the scary turns some cases can take, those lifetimes may be short ones, indeed . . .

With that in mind, this article aims to present poltergeists for use in *Call of Cthulhu* in keeping with actual literature on the subject. It gives a general overview of what little we know of them, what they could be, and what they might do. There are also tips for running a scenario, and four different types of poltergeists for Keepers to use.

Poltergeists in General

Poltergeists (German: "Poltern" -- "to knock", and "Geist" -- "spirit") are considered to be something entirely different than "ghosts" or other apparitions; the activity of a poltergeist doesn't tend to come from a known event or person. While most apparitions are the spirits of the dead or living which appear to the living, poltergeists are unknown, usually invisible entities which specialize in violent, destructive acts. There have been a few poltergeist cases where a known quantity was at work, though.

Most poltergeist cases center around an individual person, referred to as the "agent." Agents tend to be children or teenagers, often on the cusp of puberty, who are experiencing a great deal of anger and turmoil. This mental state is often caused by poor physical and/or mental health, and/or a stressful household situation.

There is a common belief among modern researchers of the paranormal that poltergeist activity could be caused by the agents themselves, via subconscious telekinesis. However, notions of an otherworldly entity being responsible still circulate among parapsychologists.

Activities

Most of the outlandish occurrences popular fiction assigns to "ghosts" could actually be the work of poltergeists. They're best known for three things in particular: moving objects, making a lot of loud noises, and making stones fall from out of nowhere. They've also been known to start fires, produce sweet or disgusting smells, tamper with electrical equipment, and scratch and bite their victims. They can manifest in a visible form, too, but this is very rare.

A poltergeist's ability to move objects is phenomenal. They can knock things off their perches, nudge them across surfaces, or slowly levitate them. They can also fling objects right through the air, one at a time or in a great swarm. The flight path these objects take can be both straight and curved, as though the poltergeist was exerting more control over the objects than just flinging them around. Sometimes, the objects a poltergeist moves are strangely warm.

Some objects affected by poltergeists seem to have been teleported, rather than merely moved. They've been able to move things from one room to another, right through doors and walls. Ghost hunter Harry Price, who investigated the Borley Rectory, had a case where a man troubled by a poltergeist reported having things appear: a coffee urn once appeared in his arms while on the bus, and, another time, a hat-box -- complete with Parisian hat inside -- appeared in his lap.

The noise, from which poltergeists get their name, is often rapping or knocking, along with footsteps, bumps, and

crashes. The poltergeist might also produce any other kind of frightening noise -- cries, whispers, moans, and violent shrieks -- or even understandable, human speech. The noise level can be anywhere from very soft to extremely loud. Sometimes the noise shakes the entire house, and can be heard for miles.

Finally, there are the stones. A hallmark of poltergeist cases is the sudden appearance of stones, which come out of seemingly nowhere and either fall, or fly, through the air. These "stonefalls" have even been known to come down indoors; stones drop from the ceiling and land on the floor, leaving no holes in the ceiling at all. Stonefalls tend to stop as abruptly as they begin.

Besides their extraordinary nature, such storms of falling stones are noteworthy for how oddly the stones behave. The stones are sometimes seen to float in the air, or else drop slowly to the ground. In one case, a man who awoke in the center of a stonefall caught one of the rocks, only to have it rise out of his hand and float away. People are rarely harmed by stonefalls, as they tend to fall around them rather than on them. However, there have been cases where stones have been thrown at people and done damage.

The "haunting" of a poltergeist can last anywhere from a few years to a few hours, though a case rarely tends to last longer than a few months. The poltergeist's activity rarely occurs without someone in the house, and almost always occurs in the presence of the agent. The hauntings usually stop as suddenly as they start, sometimes ending when the agent leaves the house for good, and sometimes following the agent around. In most cases of the latter, the agent eventually "loses" the poltergeist, and goes on to lead a normal life.

Main Theories

Poltergeists, like apparitions in general, were often decried as the work of Satan until the latter half of the 19th century. Demons and witches were suspected as the culprits, along with the obvious choice of ghosts. Exorcisms were performed to try and drive "Satan" out of those afflicted by poltergeist activity.

By the mid-century, however, Spiritualists claimed that poltergeists were, indeed, the spirits of the departed. Seances and other investigations tried to communicate with these entities, and see what they wanted.

One of the most widespread modern theories is that poltergeists are neither ghosts nor spiritual entities, but are instead caused by the agents. It has been theorized that people undergoing extreme stress can manifest what is called repressed psychokinetic energy (RPE). Under certain conditions, this energy could be released, and the activity normally associated with poltergeists could be the result. This theory is not a universal explanation, however; not all cases of poltergeist activity have an agent, much less one showing symptoms traditionally associated with agents.

The notion that the agents were the source of the poltergeists was first widely put forward by researcher Nandor Fodor in the 1930s. It was widely decried by those who refused to believe poltergeists could have a scientific, non-otherworldly explanation. Since then, the theory's gained much more acceptance, and seems to have been borne out by researches in the 60s conducted by William G. Roll -- project director of the Psychical Research Foundation.

The nature of the agents' stresses have changed over time. In the 1920s and 30s, sexual conflict was often blamed for the activity. Since the 40s, however, researchers have looked towards other repressed emotions -- such as anger and hostility -- instead of only sex.

There are other theories concerning poltergeists besides Fodor's, of course. Psychiatrist and parapsychologist Ian Stevenson has put forward the theory that rather than all poltergeists being the result of agents with RPE, some poltergeists really are ghosts.

According to Stevenson's researches, there seemed to be two degrees of poltergeist activity. In most cases where RPE could be evident, the noises the poltergeist produced seemed meaningless, and could not be used to answer questions. Light objects were tossed about in short, uncomplicated paths, and there was much breakage of objects. The activity happened fairly close to the agent, and the "haunting" tended to stop when the agent underwent successful psychotherapy.

On the other hand, in cases where there was no agent, or the agent didn't fit the common symptoms for someone with RPE, the noises did seem to have meaning, and could be used to answer questions. Heavier objects were moved in long, complicated trajectories, but there was little breakage of objects. When there was an agent, the activity occurred further away from the agent than in cases where RPE might be evident. And in these cases, the "haunting" stopped after exorcism, or other forms of intercession, were performed.

So, in the first degree, the factors could be indicative of the unfocused, subconscious lashing out of someone angry at the world around him: a stereotypical description of an agent with RPE. In the second degree, however, there are the hallmarks of a more traditional haunting, only with more violent, destructive activity. According to Stevenson's theory, these would be the ones where a real ghost is at work.

Yet another theory, given by the late parapsychologist D. Scott Rogo, suggests that the poltergeist might be an apparition which is granted some measure of personality by the agent, and then acts on his "behalf." In other words, the agent has no conscious or unconscious power to move things on his own, but the apparition does. Once this apparition receives some of the agent's personality, the poltergeist's "haunting" begins. The apparition creates a disturbance to reflect the inner turmoil of the agent, and might even attack the agent in an act of "self-hate."

Presenting Poltergeist Scenarios

Setting Up

First of all, the scenario's parameters need to be set. What sort of poltergeist is this, and what brought it about? What can it do, and what will it do? How long will it be staying? What sort of end to the scenario does the Keeper envision, or does he want to leave it open-ended?

Establishing a paper trail is a must for this sort of investigation. When did this first start happening? Who saw it happen? What was done? When did the press get wind of it, and how? It might also be a lot of fun to have an NPC reporter chronicle the investigation; the investigators can see their Credit Ratings soar and plummet as the local paper reports the strange goings-on.

The more detail that's put into the paper trail means the more time investigators can research and correlate data, rather than just waiting for a lamp to fall over. Having information on other cases would also be a good idea, in case investigators want to compare and contrast this case with others.

Scenario Length

One thing to keep in mind is that the case could take anywhere from a month to a couple of years of game time to resolve. For those players who enjoy long and protracted spookiness, with lots of opportunity for in-character research, that might be no problem. However, if your players are unaccustomed to spending more than three or four sessions on a single scenario, this could get boring.

Keepers may wish to keep the action moving by not presenting everything in a real-time basis. Once the general mood and occurrences are set, information gleaned, and initial SAN-checks made, the happenings can be summarized on a weekly basis. When something new is about to happen, or a roll could be called for, the game can go "live" again.

Era Considerations

Remember what era the scenario is taking place in, and make sure the players -- and Investigators -- are more or less on the same page when coming up with ideas. Also remember the tools and methods of the time: occultist trappings predominated during the Gaslight era, with science making slow inroads up to the Jazz age, when psychology and new physical theories began to take over.

That's not to say that a really prescient scientist couldn't have come up with the RPE theory in 1889. However, his theories would have been too far ahead of their time, and most authorities in the field would have considered him a crank.

That said, it's less anachronistic for investigators to look back, rather than forward. There's plenty of room for the modern-day occultist who insists that RPE is hogwash, and that the activity is being caused by Satan, or a spectral presence.

Those Meddling Kids

Given how news of a poltergeist case can spread, the investigators might have to deal with a lot of curious folks, unwanted distractions and meddlers. Some of the folks might be of some help, but they'll be vastly outnumbered by the mundane, wide-eyed, and useless.

The authorities might want to see if they can end the nonsense with a well-timed arrest. Spiritual agencies might demand to come pray at the house, with their congregation in tow. The press might demand to have a photographer on the scene. Rival researchers from competing organizations might show up and spend the whole time trying to debunk one another. And neighborhood kids might engineer a trick or two to add to the fun, only to get caught and be blamed for the whole thing . . .

Anything's possible, but choose your NPCs carefully. Too many will make the thing too confusing, and having some wunder-NPC show up to solve the case would be terrible.

Red Herrings

In this sort of scenario, the possibility of fraud, misjudgment, or simple error causing mistaken assumptions is too good to pass up. It could be that the lamp just fell over on its own. Maybe the lights popping all at once really was due to an overload. Perhaps the agent always moaned in her sleep, but no one ever noticed it before, or never said anything because it was too embarrassing.

The Mythos

Knowledge of the Mythos can be a boon or a bane. Any investigator who's dealt with a Lloigor might well assume the levitating bed is a sign that one's nearby. That's not such a bad idea, of course. But if the whole party gets that idea, and goes out looking for waterhorses instead of paying attention to what goes on in the house, the Scenario's momentum might break down. It's suggested that Keepers reserve a few tricks the investigators' Cthulhu Mythos scores can't explain just in case this happens.

Going Proactive

Rather than just watching helplessly -- or with notepads at the ready -- when the agent flies through the air and starts speaking in an unknown language, investigators can try to act. Magic, science, psychology, faith, and steadfast determination are their weapons in this sort of battle, but what works -- and why -- is up to the Keeper to decide.

One important factor that the investigators need to deal with is the agent. What's done to the poltergeist may adversely affect the agent, and vice versa. Getting rid of the entity will be a Pyrrhic victory if the agent is reduced to a vegetable or scarred for life.

Of course, trying to beat the poltergeist out of the house could lead to the investigators getting beaten out, themselves. One should never underestimate a poltergeist's ability to generate nauseating smells, deafening screams, fires in coat pockets and so on. Likewise, swarms of broken plate shards, cutlery, and rocks can be deadly.

Playable Poltergeists

Given the numerous theories about what poltergeists could really be, it would be a little presumptuous to write one, definitive set of statistics for them. Instead, here are a few different "poltergeists" for Keepers to use as they see fit. They could all exist comfortably alongside one another, as different causes for the same symptom. Alternatively, the Keeper can choose one over the others to be the true cause of poltergeist activity in his game.

Poltergeist Abilities

Any of the poltergeists listed below can use the following abilities. It's quite possible for these abilities to be coordinated, so long as the poltergeist succeeds in its rolls: a poltergeist could break a row of dishes, throw a cat into the air, and scream all at the same time if it felt the need to. However, as a general rule, poltergeists cannot have more actions in a single round than they have points in INT.

Keepers who want to further limit the amount of actions a poltergeist can do at once may introduce a cumulative 5% penalty to each roll past the third made in a single round.

Note that, unless otherwise noted, people and animals can count as "objects," provided the poltergeist has enough POW to try and affect them.

- **Create smells:** POW \times 5% to do. The smell can be created over an area equal to the poltergeist's INT in square feet. The smells produced can be pleasant, unsettling, disgusting, or nauseating.
- **Damage objects:** POW vs. the STR of the object on the Resistance Table. This does 1d6 damage per successful roll, and the poltergeist may break as many objects at once as it has points in INT. This can also be used to write on surfaces, crack walls, and so on. This cannot be done with living beings: see "Wounding," below.
- **Light fires:** POW vs. the STR of the object on the Resistance Table. This does 1d2 damage initially, but the damage done will increase if the fire is not extinguished. The poltergeist may ignite as many objects at once as it has points in INT.
- **Levitate objects:** POW vs. the SIZ of the object on the Resistance Table. The poltergeist may move as many objects at once as it has points in INT. Levitated objects can be lifted straight up, gently nudged in a certain direction and then dropped, or sent spinning around one another in a cloud of objects.
- **Make noises:** POW \times 5% to do. The noises can be knocks, raps, shuffling, screams, thunder, animal cries, speech, etc. These can be extremely soft or extremely loud.
- **Manifest Visibly:** POW \times 5% to do. They can appear as a person, a shapeless blob of light, or any other appearance the Keeper deems appropriate. Maximum SAN loss for beholding a poltergeist should be 1d8.
- **Move objects:** POW vs. the SIZ of the object on the Resistance Table. The poltergeist may move as many objects as it has points in INT. It can nudge or slide objects along a surface for as long as it cares to, in a straight or curved line.
- **Possession:** POW vs. the POW of the person or animal, or POW vs. the SIZ of the object. The poltergeist may speak through the possessed individuals or objects, or concentrate other abilities upon them: wounding, levitating or teleporting them, etc. If a poltergeist possesses an electrical or mechanical object, it can cause it to malfunction, start working when turned off or unplugged, or keep it from working at all.
- **Stonefalls:** POW \times 5% to activate, and can be spread over an area equal to its INT in square feet. This can be a steady fall of stones around someone or a mere trickle. The stones can fall normally or gently glide down to the ground.
- **Teleport objects:** POW vs. the SIZ of the object on the Resistance Table, and it can be moved up to a number of miles equal to INT. The poltergeist may teleport as many objects at once as it has points in INT.
- **Throw objects:** POW vs. the SIZ of the object on the Resistance Table, and then INT \times 5% chance of hitting the desired target, if any. It may throw as many objects at once as it has points in INT. Objects may be thrown in straight lines or curved ones. The damage done to someone who's hit by a flying object depends on how large the object is, how sharp, etc. Cruel Keepers can use POW to determine a damage bonus, if applicable.
- **Wounding:** POW vs. the CON of the target on the Resistance Table. These attacks do no real damage, and can appear to be made by the target, or an otherworldly entity. They can be scratches, bites, punctures, pinches, sexual assaults, writing, and so on.

Repressed Psychokinetic Energy (Fodor's Theory)

What may be the most common type of poltergeist to be found, this is where physical trauma and/or psychological strain has created a temporary psychokinetic talent in the agent. There is also some evidence to suppose that the RPE is created by a group, rather than a single individual.

The activity is subconsciously caused by the agent, who has no real control over what happens. The agent might exhibit symptoms that would indicate some physical connection to what's happening, such as an increased heartrate, sweating, fainting or the like. However, these symptoms could be attributed to fear caused by the incidents.

For this sort of poltergeist, use the POW and INT of the agent when making the rolls. If the poltergeist is created by a group, rather than an individual, use the average POW and INT. Any of the abilities listed above may be done, though some would be more logical than others in an RPE case.

Keepers may charge the agent -- or the nearest member of the group -- an MP per single ability used. Alternatively, the Keeper can say that the agent's subconscious is tapping into some other source of energy.

A look into the astral plane would most likely indicate nothing. The Keeper may rule that strange "eddies" are emitted by the agent when poltergeist activity occurs, or that the alien source of energy the agent's tapping into can be seen. In more extreme cases, an astral double of the agent might emerge from the physical body to do its mischief, and then slip back into the agent when it's done. What would happen if the investigators attacked or harmed this doppelganger is up to the Keeper to decide.

Exorcisms would most likely be useless on their face, though a comforting presence might get the activity to slow down or cease for a short while. Magic used to reveal, communicate with, or compel the dead would probably not work, either. Medical and/or psychological help would most likely be more effective than supernatural intercession alone.

Once the agent reaches puberty, gets out of the current situation he's in, or else overcomes it, the activity will most likely cease.

The Accidental Apparition (Rogo's Theory)

In keeping with D. Scott Rogo's notions, this version of the poltergeist is an unintelligent, ectoplasmic entity who accidentally gains the personality of the agent. When it encounters an agent, the trauma of the individual impresses itself on the apparition, which then acts as a proxy for the agent. It gives action to the agent's subconscious rage, turmoil and anger: breaking objects, throwing things about, and so on.

It can also torment the agent in particular, acting upon feelings of self-hate that person may have. Though the agent may have a terrible hatred of himself, the poltergeist will rarely injure him severely, due to ingrained survival instinct. That's no guarantee that the spirit won't try to kill "itself," though.

These poltergeists have no INT, and a variable amount of POW (2d6, 3d6, or 4d6). Once one encounters an agent, it gains INT equal to the agent's. They can do any of the abilities listed above. They do not have to roll to affect the agent, as any actions done to the agent -- even possession -- succeed automatically.

In the Astral Plane, the apparition might look nothing like the agent, or just like the agent. It could also appear to be a distorted image of the agent, mirroring the negative feelings he has about himself. There might be a "cord" connecting the spirit and the agent: if severed, this may end the haunting, but there could be harmful effects for the agent.

Exorcisms may help in this case, as the entity is spiritual. Magic used against the dead could be tricky, due to the connection between the apparition and the agent. Asking the spirit its name, and what it wants, could yield confusing answers. And what harms the spirit could harm the agent as well.

As with RPE cases, medical and/or psychological help for the agent would probably be more effective than spiritual methods. Physical maturation might also be enough to ameliorate the agent's feelings, or at least give him the self-confidence necessary to overcome the current situation.

Once the agent is no longer giving off strong emotions, the apparition tends to lose its connection to the agent. Bereft of INT -- and purpose -- it loses its stolen identity and floats away.

A Really Restless Spirit (Stevenson's Theory)

This version of a poltergeist presents an apparition as an intelligent, self-willed entity that is capable of affecting the physical world more spectacularly than they're supposed to. It may have a definite agenda -- frightening the living away from its house -- or it may just be causing trouble for amusement's sake. The particulars of the entity should be created by the Keeper to fit the situation at hand.

Use the rules for ghosts given on pp. 180-81 of *Call of Cthulhu*, ed. 5.6. However, instead of -- or in addition to -- their POW-draining attack, allow them to do any of the abilities listed above.

Exorcisms might be able to send the apparition packing on a temporary or permanent basis. Peeking into the astral plane would reveal the entity, of course, and magic could be used against it. Trying to find out what it wants, and cooperating with it, might be more effective than blunt force, but if it's just out to do harm then there may be no other alternative. Treat its POW as Hit Points when dealing magical damage to it.

If the apparition gets what it wants, it might "move on." It might also just go into dormancy, to awaken anew when some other problem goads it into action once more.

Poltergeist (New Non-Mythos Creature)

What might be called "the genuine article," this version of a poltergeist is an astral entity. They require close proximity to extreme and negative emotions to survive, using them much like an earthly plant uses solar energy. The feelings that agents tend to give off are ideal for this purpose, hence the poltergeists' intrusion into their lives.

A poltergeist's feeding does not directly harm the agent. When a poltergeist finds a suitable agent, it sends out a tendril and latches onto his aura. After that, it starts its trademark activity: engineering a ruckus to keep the agent in that state of mind, or else drive the individual to new extremes.

The primary enemy of this type of poltergeist is time. Their favorite agent is a mentally and physically unwell person right on the edge of puberty, but such a state of affairs can't last forever. As a result, they tend to make the most of the situation. Once puberty occurs, the agent's condition improves, or the poltergeist is otherwise driven off, it will seek out another agent and begin to feed once more.

If viewed in the Astral Plane, or exposed with spells or magical preparations -- such as the Powder of Ibn-Ghazi -- the poltergeist and its tendril are both clearly visible. Poltergeists can have variable appearances: a shapeless, luminescent blob, a dense cloud of insect-like things, a thick fog sparkling with electrical current, a hideous, alien fetus, and so on.

This type of poltergeist has INT and POW. INT is determined by rolling 3d6 -2, and POW goes from 3d6 to 4d6. SAN loss for seeing such a thing could run anywhere from 0/1 to 1d4/1d10, given their bizarre, otherworldly nature.

Poltergeists can use any of the abilities described above in the physical world. They can also defend themselves from attacks on the Astral Plane through astral combat. Treat the poltergeist's POW as Hit Points for the purposes of any magical damage done to the entity. Most intelligent poltergeists will flee after losing more than 2/3 of their POW.

A Poltergeist with low INT is little more than an accident waiting to happen. They'll either latch onto a potential agent for a quick snack and then move on, or else stay for the long term, but have no real pattern to their actions. When a strange, "one-off" shower of stones comes down in an abandoned convent, or grandma's china flips off the ledge and

smashes, but nothing else happens at all, an unintelligent poltergeist may be to blame.

On the other hand, a poltergeist with middle-to-high INT can reason, plan, and anticipate. Such creatures tend to be very cunning and sadistic, with an uncanny ability to know just what to do to keep their agents jumping. They will often go on a binge of destruction, and then back off for a few days to give the agent just a glimmer of false hope, and then savor the person's anguish as their hell starts back up again.

Exorcisms are probably quite worthless against these things, unless the comfort of having one done can empower the agent to shake off his funk. The same also applies to psychology and medical intercession: the poltergeist can anticipate such maneuvers and try to counteract them with even more audacious, or subtle, activity.

Magic is very effective in these cases, as is combating the things on their home ground. However, if an investigator somehow severs the tendril connecting the poltergeist and agent, the poltergeist will just form another tendril. The poltergeist must be severely damaged for it to break off and leave.

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We All Know How Painful Breaking Kayfabe Can Be . .

•

Do a search for "kayfabe" on the ol' World Wide Web, and you'll pop up about 8,000 hits . . . 99% of them having to do with wrestling. (Okay, I didn't actually count them all and work out a fraction, but "Every dang random choice is X, although I'm guessing there might be a couple of Ys out there, so I'm leaving myself an out" *is* rigidly defined in mathematics as 99%. So there we go.)

Anyway, "kayfabe" is an old carnie term, and it means "fake" . . . using a variant of Pig Latin. (It can also be found as "kay fabe.") Back then it meant anyone who exposed the secrets of the carnival. Nowadays in wrestling "breaking kayfabe" generally means athletes (or performers, if you prefer) letting on in any way that wrestling isn't real, or that the characters they play are, in fact, just characters. Thus if Mongo the Xenophobic Psycho graciously meets with fans and signs autographs, even though he's always portrayed as a hateful nutjob, he's guilty of breaking kayfabe. Likewise if a wrestler gets on the late-night circuit and talks about his wrestling character along with his upcoming movie, then he's probably also breaking kayfabe.

Now, it's such a useful word and phrase that each time I've heard it I've gone, "Wow! How useful! I'll need to remember that." Then I promptly forget. So, this week marks the third time I've stumbled across the phrase, and now I'm determined to use it in a column; although this may not enable me to remember it, it will at least provide my *own* writing to stumble across the idea again.

Anyway, the idea of breaking kayfabe (or not) is so useful that it has immediate application outside the world of wrestling. And, most of the time, "breaking kayfabe" is bad. For example:

- Every bad comic book/horror movie/ where a character says, "Things like this only happen in comic books/horror movies!"
- Every computer game that has a character in-game say something like, "This is going to be challenging! You may want to save your game first!"
- Every bad action show where the hero turns to the audience and says something like, "Now kids . . . don't try this at home."

These can be considered various levels of breaking kayfabe.

Fortunately, in the ironic new millennium (which, for our purposes, began around 1985), it's entirely possible to break kayfabe and still *work*; In *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*, Jay and Silent Bob can run headlong into a movie set, only to have Jay turn to Bob and say, "I hate how fake Hollywood is." (That movie also has several more examples of breaking kayfabe, and may be the biggest release in recent years centering on that notion.) Likewise, in one experiment Joel and the 'bots of *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* see a satellite launch, prompting Tom Servo to say, "Look familiar? 'In the not-too-distant future . . .'", to which Joel replies, "We're not supposed to know about that . . ." But even then breaking kayfabe is a dangerous proposition; for every person who finds the ironic comment to the audience amusing, someone else may be annoyed. And it's generally easier to break kayfabe successfully in humorous works than serious ones; having the medieval villain chortle madly about his visions of the future -- replete with smoke-bellowing iron horses and mass-produced thunder-sticks -- will usually be met with cries of, "oh, c'mon . . ." from the audience.

Which brings us to roleplaying games. Since roleplaying worlds also (gasp!) aren't real, *and* since they often only work if we believe (on some level) that they *are* real, a fair bit of work can go into making sure they seem real. And the only thing generally keeping them "real" is the import we place on *not* breaking kayfabe.

Thus, for example, I once had a mage in a Dark Ages game who was attempting to create a device that would vibrate water at such a high rate that the friction would heat the object in question; these "micro-waves" within the moisture, she explained, were much more efficient than standard heating techniques. Dennis, our GM, put the kibosh on this idea

right away, and rightly so . . . it broke kayfabe for no good reason. ("How?" some of you may ask. Well, because I used the precise technique *and* terminology of a technology that wouldn't be invented for 800 years.)

In another session one of my players -- again, in game -- started arguing with a demon that had been making threats toward the party. "Oh, yeah? Well, I don't think you're going to kill us. Why? Because no one *ever* dies around here. We can be as stupid as we want, and none of us are going to *die!*" (His goal was to distract the demon so the party could carry out the rest of the plan.)

The player was obviously commenting on my extreme reluctance to kill characters in-game without reason. He was also breaking kayfabe; just because the *players* know I may not kill the heroes as a GM, doesn't mean the *heroes* know. I pondered this, got up, went to the restroom, got a soda, pondered some more, came back, and had the demon open up the earth and swallow the character. (On the bright side, it *was* enough of a distraction for the plan to be carried out.)

For those of you who are looking to experiment with some "light" possibilities of breaking kayfabe, consider tinkering with it. For example, in any genre game, consider the notion that someone in that genre wants to write about the PCs. Thus, in a supers game, a comic company may want to chronicle the heroes' exploits. Or a horror movie director may follow around some Cthulhu investigators. In fact, these options almost always work out better in an RPG than they do in the movies or on TV; since an RPG *isn't* a TV show, it doesn't have the same conventions, and feels sufficiently more "real" than (say) a horror TV show about people making a horror TV show. (But, again, it can still work . . . see *X-Files* or *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*)

Now, obviously different groups will place different import on kayfabe. The idea *is* to have fun, and if everyone is enjoying themselves by having characters say, "I only need to kill one more orc before I get enough experience to become more powerful!" . . . well, by all means, have a blast.

But just remember that, once you start talking to the audience, it can be *very* difficult for either side to forget the other exists. And once you break kayfabe, carnies will come and ruin your life.

(And, no, the earth-swallowed character wasn't *really* dead . . . but it took a few adventures to rescue the wayward hero, and you can *believe* the sweating players never doubted my ability to make the heroes' lives miserable.)

* * *

September 11th was a solemn anniversary for many, myself included. But, as I struggle to reflect upon the events of that day, I realize I have nothing more to say than I did [last year](#). When words fail, may solemn silence serve.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Tangents** (for **Alternity**), p. 10.*

*(Two stars) "I submit to you that the most important, yet most often forgotten, rule of good GMing is this: **Roleplaying games are entertainment; your goal as GM is to make your games as entertaining as possible for all participants.**"*

In The Beginning . . .

24 Ways To Start A Fantasy Adventure That Take You Nowhere Near A Tavern

by Gary McBride

"And so after trekking for two weeks across the Sea of Sand and through the Hills of Havok, you arrive in Greymoore, a small farming community on the edge of the Fuzzy Forest . . . "

"Yeah, whatever. We go to the tavern and talk to the mysterious stranger in the corner."

"You what?"

"Tavern. Corner. Mysterious stranger. What'd I miss?"

"But . . . how did you . . . "

"It's a well known fact that every tavern has a mysterious stranger skulking in the corner looking to hire adventurers. So, is he there?"

"Well . . . yes."

"Great. So, what does he want?"

Every genre has its clichés and certainly fantasy is no exception. Dragons breathe fire. Elves live in the forest. Adventures begin in a tavern.

Clichés are not always bad. Sometimes they give us a necessary common ground. But sometimes they are just plain boring. And while dragons may continue to spit flame, and elves may always hug their trees, this article endeavors to find two dozen better ways to hook your players than the ubiquitous mysterious stranger in the tavern's darkened corner.

1. Déjà Vu

A week before arriving at their destination, one of the more spiritual members of the party (perhaps a cleric or a monk) is haunted by a recurring nightmare. These dark visions shows a great evil playing out in some unfamiliar locale always ending in the death of some or all of his comrades. When our heroes finally arrive at their destination, the people and places are eerily familiar. And then the foreseen events, trivial perhaps at first, begin to play out one at a time . . .

2. The Wages Of Greed

Most groups of adventurers travel with an irresistible but often underused adventure hook -- the thief. Give him something to steal that gets the party in a lot of trouble, be it the crown jewels, the wizard's gold, or the cardinal's platinum holy symbol. Run the actual theft as a separate session away from your usual game time, so that both in and out of character, the players won't suspect why a certain NPC suddenly hates them. Maybe the duke's men aren't harassing our heroes just because the duke is a bad guy . . .

3. Hasty Promises

This beginning is particularly appropriate if the characters are traveling with a paladin or any other dedicated do-gooder. A hasty promise can force the characters to perform deeds that they would never think of doing on their own. A wily merchant may finagle a promise out of the unsuspecting hero to escort his daughter back home -- of course home is not across town as the merchant implied, but through a wood infested with bandits eager to get revenge after the last time the merchant swindled them . . .

4. The Old Poisoned Healing Potion Trick

Our heroes are hurt in a fight with some sort of unpleasant beast. Shortly thereafter, they encounter an all-too-convenient peddler of healing potions or perhaps anti-poison salves (if the beast was poisonous). He thanks them for ridding the forest of this menace and sells them his wares at a bargain price. Of course the potions contain a subtle and almost undetectable poison that kills instantly in twenty-four hours. The peddler knows where to get the antidote (he doesn't have it on him, of course) but only if our heroes do him this one favor . . .

5. Kidnapping

One of the characters is kidnapped, and now the rest of the party must try to get him back. Maybe this act is revenge by some long time enemy, or an opportunistic crime to prey on rich adventurers. Regardless, the players must act quickly to save their snatched companion. In the meantime, the player whose character is kidnapped gets to help play the villains . . .

6. Bring 'Em Back Alive

An earthquake causes a jail to be split asunder, and a group of convicts escape. The local lord is offering a sizeable reward for the recapture of these dangerous individuals. The ruler is a fair man, however, and wants these criminals captured alive so that they may face their just punishment at the hands of the law. Or, maybe later it come out that these "dangerous individuals" were wrongly imprisoned by a tyrannical despot who needs information from them for his despicable scheme . . .

7. Imposters!

The characters arrive in a village where everyone recognizes them like they were old friends. Our heroes have never laid eyes on these people or this village before. And then it comes to light that they owe a gullible-but-honest merchant a great deal of money that they borrowed to "finance their next heroic expedition." The imposters who were capitalizing upon the heroes' reputations have, of course, already skipped town with the cash . . .

8. Shipwrecked

The characters' ship is overtaken by a storm at sea and they are shipwrecked on a small uncharted island. Living here is a wizard who prefers to be left alone with his innocent daughter and his esoteric research on the curious ruins that dot the island. Or perhaps the island is populated with two tribes of warring natives who each want the heroes' help in destroying the other . . .

9. The Duel

A young swordsman challenges one of the characters, perhaps a renowned fighter, to a duel. The handsome and arrogant young duelist seeks either to prove his martial superiority or to repay some real or perceived slight. The swordsman is hopelessly outmatched, but utterly unwilling to concede defeat, lunging at his opponent even when grievously wounded. Of course, killing the swordsman outright has repercussions -- maybe he is the duke's impetuous son, or perhaps he is driven by trying to out do his father, a powerful but retired adventurer. Conceding to the youngster means that he begins besmirching the character's reputation wherever he goes. It is also possible that the swordsman is truly a nobody, but when word gets out of the duel the local magistrate comes calling to enforce the

prohibition against dueling . . .

10. Blasphemy!

The characters travel through a strange and unfamiliar nation and unintentionally violate a local religious taboo. Maybe they eat fish on Friday or fail to bow at the local shrine before entering a church. Regardless, our heroes are condemned by the local clergy as blasphemers against the gods. They face the real possibility of being thrown in jail or even lynched. Of course a simple apology isn't satisfactory. The high priest may be willing to grant them absolution, but only if they help him with this little errand . . .

11. Debt And Taxes

The characters haven't been keeping up with their treasure taxes. Or maybe one of the characters has a family member die and he inherits a sizeable debt. Regardless, the characters find themselves owing some authority figure far more than they could ever hope to repay. Turning into hunted fugitives is hardly heroic, so now our heroes either need to find some cash quick or find some way of convincing their creditor to forgive the debt . . .

12. Whose Side Are We On?

The characters encounter a doddering old man and his young beautiful daughter being attacked by thugs on the roadside. Naturally our heroes lend a hand and save the day. The two victims are very grateful, and when escorted to a nearby place of safety thank the heroes for their efforts perhaps even giving them a small reward. The characters proceed to their destination and discover a standing bounty for an evil wizard (he was out of spells when attacked on the road) and his temptress daughter who have escaped after murdering the local ruler during a failed coup attempt . . .

13. The Old Switcheroo

A doppelganger or an illusionist replaces one of the characters, or perhaps an evil magic weapon or artifact dominates our hapless victim. Regardless, the character continues to be played by the same player (so pick your best actor for the role), but is now an evil being with some sort of sinister plan. The villain feeds our heroes some "information" that causes them to become pawns in his scheme. If caught, he reveals that his minions are holding the victim hostage and will kill the helpless character if the doppelganger is harmed . . .

14. The Revolution Has Begun

A peasant revolt begins literally as the characters arrive in town. Perhaps the peasants have legitimate grievances or they are being manipulated by some sinister agent to overthrow their just lord. Regardless, our heroes get caught in the middle. If they help the peasants, they are branded as rebels and outlaws. If they help the lord, they are decried as pawns of the oppressors. And perhaps, even if they do nothing, they are assumed to be working for one side or the other . . .

15. The Wrong Side Of The Law

One of the characters has inadvertently broken the law. Perhaps he has fallen victim to a ridiculous and archaic statute that still carries the death penalty, for example an ancient prohibition against carrying two swords unless noble. Or perhaps the character really did do something blatantly illegal (see 2. The Wages of Greed for an example). Regardless, one of our heroes or a valued henchman is now in jail and sentenced to hang shortly. The players must either break him out of his prison or find something that will convince the local magistrate to repeal his sentence . . .

16. Blackmail

Often, adventurers have checkered pasts. That past could easily turn up at an inconvenient moment. Have some

important and powerful NPC gain proof of the character's past misdeeds and use it to blackmail the poor sap into helping him. The character should be given an errand that is neither heroic nor profitable and has the unfortunate task of convincing his fellow heroes to go along with it. Besides, if the information does come out, it may also besmirch the reputations of his comrades thanks to guilt by association . . .

17. The Dead Carrier Pigeon

The characters find a dead carrier pigeon with an arrow sticking out of it. The carrier pigeon has an important (though coded) message that will affect the course of an ongoing war, perhaps warning the local lord of an imminent ambush or betrayal. Our heroes must now deliver the messages themselves. But this won't be easy. The reason a carrier pigeon was employed rather than a messenger is because the intended receiver is on the other side of the enemy army . . .

18. Mistaken Identity

One of the characters looks amazingly similar to a wanted villain, the king, or some other influential NPC. Suddenly, the enemies of the NPC are after our hero for no obvious reason. Or perhaps the king employees the unknowing dupe (through a proxy of course) to lead some of his enemies on a merry goose chase while he takes care of some important business . . .

19. Who Invited Them Along?

Our heroes arrive to find that there was some sort of pressing need, but that another similar group of adventurers is already working on the problem. It will take some convincing of the local ruler or the village in need that they require a second group of heroes. But even then the characters must compete with their rivals to solve the adventure before or better than the other group. This sort of opening can turn even a routine save-the-village-from-bandits scenario into something much more interesting. And by the way, the competitors are in no mood to work with unknown strangers and split the reward even more ways . . .

20. The Burning Monastery

One night the characters see in the distance a bright glow on the horizon, like a huge bonfire. If they investigate, they discover that raiders (who have already fled the scene) have assaulted a local monastery. The raiders slaughtered all the monks and have set fire to the place. The monks kept an irreplaceable collection of books in their monastery and now that precious store of ancient knowledge will be lost if our heroes don't act fast. But saving the books is just the beginning. Now the characters must find a way to transport a ton or so of aging manuscripts to the nearest place of safety. And of course, the raiders are still about and may wonder what the characters found that was so valuable that they would go to all this trouble . . .

21. King For A Day

A character (preferably one who doesn't know his parents or real background) receives word that he is the long lost brother of the now deceased king. He receives official looking documents that prove his royal lineage and he and his companions are invited back to the castle to take his rightful place on the throne. The truth is that the real king is not dead, but in fact has heard of this character's mysterious background and is using it to his advantage. The king knows that one of his family members is trying to assassinate him to ascend to the throne. He hopes that by giving them another target that he can flush out the traitor. Of course, this puts the new "king" and his friends in a great deal of danger . . .

22. Patsies

The characters encounter a friendly traveler who warns our heroes that there are bandits in these woods and he himself just had to flee from a pack of the rascals. However, this friendly stranger is more than what he seems. He is in fact a

very capable thief who just made off with a valuable treasure (perhaps a magic item or very rare piece of jewelry). The local constabulary is close behind him, so the stranger does not stay long. He stays only long enough to deftly plant the stolen item on an unsuspecting character. He hopes that the adventurers will either be ignored or be able to fight off the pursuers and that the thief can return later and steal back his prize. The chasing guards, who are unsure of the thief's exact appearance, do however attempt to search the unwary party, likely finding the stolen item. That is when the trouble starts . . .

23. The Posse

The characters are met by a posse organized to hunt down a wanted criminal who is on the loose. The local sheriff fears that he has too few deputies to confront this villain and is eager to recruit new blood. What the sheriff doesn't know is that the criminal has already met up with his old gang perhaps fleeing back to his old hideout or even now getting ready to ambush his pursuers . . .

24. The Crusade Of Innocents

The land has long been plagued with undead or other strange evil creatures. A local cleric had a vision that, if he would lead a crusade of a hundred truly innocent souls towards the source of this evil, his god would purge the darkness from among them. He has been traveling from town to town for some time recruiting his "crusaders" and now has more than enough followers. The priest and his devotees are unarmed, unarmored, and barely avoiding starvation. Many of them are children. It should be obvious to our heroes that the priest is quite mad, and that he is leading these poor souls towards their own death or maybe even worse. The characters can either try to stop the crusade, try to help the crusade succeed by clearing out the evil before the innocents arrives (perhaps the cleric's vision wasn't false after all!), or could be hired by one the "innocents" family to save their beloved child from certain death . . .

Ten . . . HUT!!!

An Alternate Treatment of Military Rank for *GURPS*

by Douglas Cole

The *GURPS* advantage Military Rank is excellent for "generic" adventures, especially with a mixed group of players. Having a player that is a Lieutenant or Captain is a useful thing for the Contacts he brings, as well as the always-popular access to high tech or deadly equipment. However, in military-based campaigns such as *WWII*, *Special Ops*, and *Traveller: Ground Forces* or *Traveller: Mercenaries*, it can matter a great deal whether a character is a corporal or sergeant, both of which are treated as Rank-1 (5pts) in *GURPS*. The existing Rank rules can be optionally replaced in such campaigns.

The system below is based on the United States military rank and grade systems; most Western countries use something similar. Grades are divided between Enlisted, Warrant Officer, and Officer ranks; there are nine grades of enlisted rank (E-1 through E-9), four grades of Warrant Officer Rank (W-1 through W-4), and eleven grades of Officer rank (O-1 through O-11).). Again, this is for the US military-other countries may eliminate ranks, or have a certain grade be given more or less responsibility.

Enlisted Personnel and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs)

Enlisted personnel are divided in to four grades. The amount of command and responsibility can be fairly minimal until you get to grade E-5 (A sergeant or equivalent).

Enlisted Rank Table

Grade	Rank	Cost
E-1	Private	0
E-2	Private	1/2
E-3	Private 1st Class	1
E-4	Specialist	2

The rank of Specialist is still an enlisted man, though he shares a grade with the NCO Corporal rank. The difference in cost reflects the difference in responsibility.

Non-Commissioned Officers

NCOs are the backbone of a professional army. While outranked in the letter of the law by officers, good NCOs virtually run any real line unit, and have the bulk of actual combat and "hard nosed" experience. There are six levels of NCO, from Grade E-4 to E-9. To become a Sergeant Major in the US Army, a position that takes years to achieve, costs 17 points.

NCO Rank Table

Grade	Rank	Cost
E-4	Corporal	3
E-5	Sergeant	5
E-6	Staff Sergeant	8
E-7	Sergeant 1st Class	11
E-8	Master Sergeant	14

E-8	First Sergeant	14
E-9	Sergeant Major	17
E-9	Command Sergeant Major	17
E-9	Sergeant Major of the Army	20

Certain ranks hold the same grade, but will be used in different positions. First Sergeant and Command Sergeant Major tend to be staff positions, while Master Sergeant and Sergeant Major are line positions. The staff positions will frequently come with many Contacts, and high levels of Reputation-not to mention a ton of responsibility. A Command Sergeant Major is the primary NCO for an entire Regiment, for example, and the Sergeant Major of the Army is only one person! This person will be respected by colonels and generals, and held in awe by mere lieutenants. Truly, in many cases it is really the Reputation and Contacts that come with each position that gives it its real utility.

Warrant Officers

Warrant officers are typically technical specialists at particular jobs. There are five levels of such officers, and their cost is intermediate between senior NCOs and junior officers. They typically do not lead units, but might be assigned to them for their particular area of expertise. Warrant Officers rate a salute from enlisted men, and are frequently in charge of many administrative offices, such as Finance and Personnel. Warrant officers run most battalion Aid Stations and Troop Medical Clinics. US Army helicopter pilots are also typically Warrant officers, although many former WO positions are becoming mandatory commission positions. Other than Pilots, most warrant officers were formerly enlisted, usually at least grade E-5.

Warrant Officer Rank Table

Grade	Rank	Cost
W-1	Warrant Officer	8
W-2	Chief Warrant Officer	10
W-3	Chief Warrant Officer	12
W-4	Chief Warrant Officer	14
W-5	Master Warrant Officer	16

Officers

There are three levels of company grade officers, three more of field grade officers, and five grades of general officer. Company grade officers (2nd and 1st lieutenants, and captains) lead actual combat units of squad, platoon, or company size. Field grade officers (majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels) command much larger units, up to and including a regiment. Finally, general officers command division-sized units or larger. Point cost for officers are as follows:

Officer Rank Table

Grade	Rank	Cost
O-1	2nd Lieutenant	8
O-2	1st Lieutenant	11
O-3	Captain	14
O-4	Major	18
O-5	Lieutenant Colonel	22
O-6	Colonel	26
O-7	Brigadier General	31
O-8	Major General	36
O-9	Lieutenant General	41
O-10	General	46
O-11	General of the Army	50

A glance at the enlisted and officer cost tables shows that it costs the same to be enlisted grade E-7 as it does to be Officer grade O-2 (and in between W-2 and W-3). This is a fair reflection of military reality. The "higher rank" of the officer is offset by the long experience of the enlisted man. One historical note: In WWII, Omar Bradley, the General of the Army, was the last 5-star general; the rank has not been used since. That position would cost 50 points.

Reputation and status: Personnel get a free level of Status beginning after ten points are spent on Rank (O-2, W-2, and E-7). A further level of status is granted at O-6 (Colonel). "Three-star" equivalents (O-9) and above get one more, yielding Status-3. Good (or bad!) NCOs and command level officers should also have a service Reputation; by that time, people know who you are!

Despite the regimented nature of military organizations, there are frequent cases of a lower "E", or "O" grade holding position that would usually require a higher grade. They don't get paid more, and shortages are common. A Specialist squad leader is not that unusual, though if he is likely to stay there, then a lateral promotion to corporal is usually coming soon.

Leaving the Military: The high cost of rank is much less useful after you get out of the service. Reduce point costs by 60% to reflect the lesser utility of your rank when you retire from the service. Discharge strips you of all rank; dishonorable discharge also strips you of status, and gives you a Negative Reputation to boot! Higher ranking officers and enlisted men who have served for a long time may receive a pension (which is why the rank isn't discounted further).

Courtesy Rank and Seniority: In some cases, military service personnel from different branches may be serving alongside each other (such as an Air Force Major being on an Aircraft Carrier with a Navy Lieutenant Commander-- both are the same grade, O-4). In this case, the "brother" service rank counts for very little (the Air Force Major would be treated with "due respect", but he's an interloper, outside the chain of command, and his orders would carry very little weight). For long-term space campaigns such as in Traveller, this could be a nearly constant occurrence. For such situations, apply a 40% discount to the cost of the rank (making it equivalent in cost to Courtesy Rank). Most of the time, you are outside the chain of command, but should the tables turn, you act with your full authority.

* * *

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Nonhuman Rights in the Transhuman United States

by Steven E. Ehrbar

One of the aspects of the *Transhuman Space* setting that has caused the most debate and provoked the most questions are the details of how nonhuman sapient fit into society. For the United States of 2100, the answers flow from the legal rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court and the messy coalition compromises of its political system.

" . . . The Framers and writers of the amendments never intended that the Constitutional definition of 'person' include nonhumans, even though many believed in the existence of sapient nonhumans (such as angels and demons). Therefore, whether or not an AI program is sapient or not, it is not a person for purposes of the Constitution of the United States. Some have called this repugnant. But this Court cannot amend the Constitution to rectify even grossly repugnant situations without exceeding its authority . . . " -- Sanchez v. Massachusetts Institute of Technology

"Look, I don't care what the Court said. Sapient beings are people, and they should be treated accordingly!" -- Edina Smith, Sapient Rights Watch

The most fundamental ruling on pan-sapient rights in the U.S. was the 2068 Sanchez decision, when the Attorney General Julia Kennedy Sanchez of Massachusetts filed suit on the behalf of LOGOS. Her argument was that the federally funded MIT project that created LOGOS was holding a ward of the state of Massachusetts (because LOGOS was a minor with no family) in a state of slavery, and demanded that custody be granted to the Massachusetts Department of Social Services. After great deliberation, a compromise decision was hammered out by six members of the Supreme Court that simultaneously declared that nonhumans were not people under the law, but that it was immoral for them to be treated as mere property.

Both supporters and opponents of pan-sapient rights disliked the Court ruling. Pan-sapient rights organizations hated it because it denied the AIs personhood, the Born Human Movement because it carried a hint of potential Court intervention. Hopes on both sides of the Court changing its mind by changing its membership were dashed by the advance of medical nanotech, and both sides have been dueling with each other through a messy and often gridlocked political system ever since.

*" . . . Genetic alteration sufficient to make a person not a member of the species *H. sapiens* is not sufficient to deny personhood, as it is merely an extension of racial genetic divergence, and discrimination on such basis is prohibited. Nor does being artificially assembled from vat-grown cells; there is no basis for distinguishing between people born of wholly natural processes and those born through various degrees of medical intervention that supersedes the Fourteenth Amendment. The State of Michigan may not simply declare otherwise. Miss Ashley Smith, a 'Sea Shepherd', is a person, a U.S. citizen, and a citizen of Michigan . . . "* -- Smith v. Michigan

"They're not people! They're just machines. Made out of meat, yes, but the same meat you grow in a fauxflesh vat." -- Jordan Richards, Born Human Movement

The early battles went heavily in favor of the Born Human Movement, who managed to establish a limited set of anti-cruelty laws to protect sapient AIs, while leaving them without any real rights. But the attempt to limit bioroids in the same manner a few years later was too much for the more moderate members of Born Human. Bioroid control laws were only passed in a handful of states, and were quickly brought before the Supreme Court and thrown out. Eventually compromise legislation passed in all states (under Federal pressure), declaring that bioroids were legally children from assembly until reaching the legal age of majority, usually eighteen years.

This was less than a full victory for the pan-sapient rights organizations; to this day they are trying to have bioroids be declared adults much more quickly, on the order of a few years instead of many.

However, the single successful attempt (in Vermont) to pass such a law in a state this faced a hostile state court. The court ruled that allowing bioroids to achieve majority sooner was discrimination against naturally-born persons, and

thus in violation of the equal protection clause of the state constitution. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to review the ruling, with the explanation that no issue of Federal law was involved.

". . . The Congress has been granted an unmitigated power to establish the rules of naturalization in Article I, Section 8. No limit is made as to who or even what Congress may naturalize, if it sees fit. Accordingly, it may make Ghosts citizens. Additionally, the Fourteenth Amendment clearly states the '[n]o State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States;' logically, then, they have no power to declare any citizen a nonperson . . ." -- Soros v. Zapata

"Oh, that's a load of bull. They aren't people, even if they were copied from people. And the Founders never intended Congress to have the right to make things citizens." -- Wayland Munez, Alliance for Biosapience

The final major battleground for the pan-sapient rights movement in the U.S. erupted over the rights of Ghosts, sapient AIs created by the destructive uploading of humans. Born Human, tottering after the bioroid controversies, was destroyed by internal debate over these originally-human-but-now-electronic sapients. In the temporary political vacuum, Ghosts were recognized as the legal continuation of the biological person who was destructively uploaded. Challenges to the act by biochauvinist groups was turned down, the Court leaning on the thin reeds of Congressional authority over the naturalization of citizens and the legal personhood of corporations to uphold what in practice was a wide and popular political consensus.

However, the Congressional act made it clear that only one copy of the original could be active at any time; activating other xoxes was made a serious felony worth two to ten years in prison. Furthermore, an active xox itself was classified with all other SAIs as a nonperson, and their existence was outlawed. Although challenged by supporters of pan-sapient rights, the Court upheld the restrictions on the grounds that xoxes were not sufficiently different from SAIs to have Constitutional protection from destruction.

"Hey hey! Ho ho! AI slavery's got to go!" -- Pansapient Action League rally in Washington D.C.

"The man is dead, though the Ghost runs on / Delete the unholy abomination!" -- Biolife Defense Committee counter-rally in Washington D.C.

Although the compromises of the status quo are accepted by the general public of the U.S., dozens of organizations continue to press the issues, with varying degrees of zealotry. The major groups involved today are:

- **Alliance for Biosapience:** The largest of the mainstream biochauvinist organizations, the Alliance for Biosapience actively lobbies for the repeal of Ghost rights laws. The organization is completely neutral on the issue of animal uplifts. It is headquartered in New York City, with local organizations under tight central administration.
- **Biolife Defense Committee:** Started by labor unions as an anti-automation pressure group, it has evolved into an extreme biochauvinist organization. Biolife chapters have been repeatedly investigated for possible involvement in acts of vandalism and Ghost destruction. While the national headquarters is in Detroit, local chapters are essentially independent and disagree seriously about animal uplift rights.
- **Born Human Movement:** After the Ghost controversies, the Born Human Movement was reorganized into its current form. From its national offices in Washington, D.C., it currently pushes for the repeal of all laws granting personal rights to bioroids, while defending the rights of Ghosts.
- **Pansapient Action League:** This Seattle-based organization specializes in civil disobedience and "direct action" (property crimes) to further pan-sapient rights. Targets have included Biotech Euphrates and GenTech Pacifica facilities, SAI-programming software company offices, and federal law-enforcement facilities.
- **Sapient Rights Watch:** The mainstream pan-sapient rights organization, Sapient Rights Watch is currently focused on countering the efforts of other organizations to repeal Ghost and bioroid rights laws. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., its long-term goal is to get laws passed granting SAIs the same rights as Ghosts. Most members are sympathetic to the idea of special protections for uplifted animals, but don't believe they're ready for full citizenship.
- **Uplift Rights Now:** Headquartered in Los Angeles, this organization argues that the Astropus, Jagrilla Hound, Neo-Coon, and War Dop should be legally recognized as people. Some accuse it of actively kidnapping uplifted

animals and shipping them to the European Union. URN spokesmen say it wouldn't do that -- not because it would be wrong to liberate uplifts, but because the Europeans are also oppressive.

Pyramid Review

On Location: The Feng Shui GM Screen



Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Jeff Tidball

Illustrated by Didier Florentz (cover), Brendon Frain and Brian Frain

\$17.95

Atlas Games is very up front about what sort of product *On Location* actually is: a piece of cardboard and a sheet of paper. Which is what you would expect for a *Feng Shui* release, as the game itself is invariably forthright in an all-guns-blazing, all-fists-flying kind of a way. Upon closer inspection the piece of cardboard turns out to be the GM's screen of the title and the sheet of paper a booklet of locations all ready and described for the GM to use as the need arises. What is surprising about *On Location* is how long it has taken for *Feng Shui* to get its own referee screen, given the number of supplements available for the game . . . but this is less surprising when you consider the somewhat unusual publishing history of *Feng Shui*.

The screen itself consists of four panels with a Didier Florentz illustration on the front. This depicts a mid-fight scene between various heroes and the bad guy abominations. It is a little static and shows only the combatants engaging in sorcery and gunplay; showing a little fisticuffs would also seem appropriate. The reverse of the screen includes just about every table a GM might want. These are laid out against a light gray pattern and are easy to read. The tables cover doing stuff; lifting and throwing; knowledge and contacts checks; difficulty listings for all sorts of actions; damage values for about every kind of weapon -- including a big list of guns; and a final list of *Feng Shui's* many Fu Shticks. At the bottom right-hand side of most of the tables is a reference number relating to a page in the Atlas Games edition of the *Feng Shui* rulebook. This allows the GM to turn quickly to the necessary page should more information be required. Where the contents of a table are taken from various sources, no reference number is included. Some tables include material from Golden Comeback and Seal of the Wheel sourcebooks and this is also noted. The screen is not perfect, nor is it bereft of spelling errors, but GM will still want to keep this screen nearby in order to speed up their game and cut down the need to refer to the rulebook.

The 32-page booklet is really the meat of this product's title -- On Location. This contains and details some 13 individual locations that the GM more than likely uses frequently in their game. They include Airport Terminal, Alleyway, Convenience Store, Corporate Offices, DMV, Emergency Room, Family Restaurant, Parking Garage, Public Park, Seedy Bar, Supermarket, Trendy Restaurant, and Warehouse. Each is two or so pages long, occasionally illustrated in cartoon style by Brian Frain and mapped by Brendan Frain where necessary.

Each location is described in several ways. "What It Is" gives a single sentence description of the location, and "Where It's At" tells you where it can be found. The "Inside" and "Outside" sections provide much more detail about the place, and "Getting In" describes how entry can be gained. "Why It's In Your Game" suggests several reasons for including it in a *Feng Shui* game, and "Look! I Found A . . ." gives a list of the mundane and interesting things that can be found there and put to inventive use -- particularly in a fight. The final section is entitled "Cool TTCH" which has abbreviated from "Cool Things That Could Happen" to cut down on both author time and book space. It is also self-explanatory.

At first glance (and perhaps even second or third) the 13 locations described in *On Location* would seem to be all too mundane and run of the mill. That would be a fair assumption, but really the purpose of *On Location* is to spice up each of these places once they enter play. Thus, however many times the characters have been to a warehouse or ended

up in another alley and had yet another fight, there is something in the descriptions here that could be employed to set them apart from some other Warehouse or Alleyway. For example, the Warehouse under "Look! I Found A . . ." suggests a Safety Blade (which does less damage for that reason), a stash of adult magazines hidden by a security guard to keep them from his wife, and a box that could contain anything -- packing materials, snow globes, cheap watches, or even a display case or two of *On The Edge* cards! Likewise, "Cool TTCH" for the Warehouse suggests various uses of the fork lift truck, toppling the shelves, and allowing a melee to ensue on the shelves, among others.

On Location does this with every place it describes, and goes one step further with a final entry entitled "Everywhere Else." As not every setting can be covered in just 32 pages, this expands on the "Look! I Found A . . ." section to list "Improvised Weaponry," "Clues," and "Miscellaneous"; and the "Cool TTCH" to list "The Mook Goes Down," "A Character Fumbles a . . ." for martial arts attacks, gun attacks, and driving rolls. Both this last section and all of the suggestions for each of the places are useful enough. Yet they do something else, too; they act as nudges for the GM's imagination, providing a springboard for the referee to come up with ideas of his own for the game. Some of the suggestions might be clichés, but these are as much a part of *Feng Shui* as is its inventiveness. Indeed, the format for the locations is partially adaptable and it could easily be used as a template in other *Feng Shui* supplements.

The usefulness of the GM screen in *On Location* cannot be denied, helping to make what is already a fast-paced game go even smoother, if not faster! Likewise the booklet of places and associated ideas is just as useful; unfortunately, there are just not enough of them. One almost wishes that Atlas Games had released a book similar to their [At Your Service](#) sourcebook for the *Over the Edge RPG*, but obviously for *Feng Shui*. As good as this package is, the purchaser is still going to think hard before paying out \$18. Had the *On Location* booklet been longer, this would not necessarily be a consideration.

--Matthew Pook

(with thanks to Dickie at Wayland's Forge)

A Brief History Of Dice

by Emily Gaskin

In the *History of Kings of Norway*, Snorri Sturluson records the story of the ultimate dice throw and every gamer's dream. Under contention was the Island of Hising, a valuable settlement that had belonged both to Sweden and Norway in turn. The two kings agreed to decide ownership with a simple dice throw; he who threw highest would win the island once and for all.

The king of Sweden threw first: the two dice came up sixes. Immensely pleased with himself, the Swedish king boasted that it was pointless for King Olaf of Norway to throw. The island clearly belonged to him.

Olaf picked up the dice and, while shaking them in his hand, declared, "There are two sixes still on the dice, and it is a trifling matter for God, my Lord, to have them turn up."

He then threw the dice, and a six turned up on one of the dice, but the other die split miraculously in two, so that both the six and the one showed. King Olaf claimed victory and the island settlement.

How many of you can boast a natural 13 on 2d6?

Stories of lucky (and *unlucky*) dice rollers fill historical archives, but how often do our textbooks reflect what the ancients and today's gamers know all too well: dice change the world. The very word dice has its origins in the Latin *datum*, "that which is given or decreed, (by lot or fortune)." What we use to control fate in our games harkens back to the days of old when prophets cast dice made of sheep anklebone to predict the future. Called knucklebones, they offer the earliest archaeological evidence of dice.

Since their first uses as divination tools, dice turn up across cultures and continents whenever a situation requires randomization, be it for arbitration, gambling, or gaming. Athenian playwright Sophocles claims that Greek warrior Palamedes invented them during the Trojan War, but dice in the form we know them today have been found in excavations in China, India, and North and South America. They've even been found in Egyptian tombs dating back to 2000 BC, proving that the Egyptians knew what was important in life and the afterlife. (A startling number of gamers follow in this tradition, stipulating in their wills that they be buried with their lucky dice.)

Your average dice today are made of cellulose and other plastics, but in the past, dice makers have drawn on a wealth of odd and biodegradable resources. They've crafted dice from peach stones, seeds, buffalo bone, deer horn, pottery, walnut shells, pebbles, and woodchuck teeth. The Greeks and Romans preferred more precious materials, fashioning dice out of ivory, bronze, agate, onyx, rock crystal, alabaster, marble, and amber.

Dice made from hazelnuts figure in the "Gambler's Lament", a frustrated dice roller's plea for mercy, which appears in *The Rig Veda*, a collection of ancient Indian religious hymns. The unlucky gambler bemoans the cruelty of the dice, calling them "unearthly coals thrown down on the gaming board, though cold they burn out the heart." He offers up this entreaty:

*"Dice, grant us your friendship; have pity on us.
Do not bewitch us with the force of your terrible sorcery.
Lay to rest your anger, your hatred.
Let someone else fall into the trap of the brown dice."*

You might try reciting this hymn before a critical saving throw, though positive results cannot be guaranteed, for dice, and Fate, are ever fickle.

If prayers to dice deities don't succeed, you can always resort to a favored trick of the ancients: cheat dice. Loaded dice -- those weighted under one surface -- and shaped dice -- those shaved down on one or more sides -- have been found

in prehistoric graves in Asia, the Americas, Northern Europe, and, not to forget, the tombs of the ancient Egyptians. Some historians have argued that King Olaf's dice were in fact trick dice, and that none of the witnesses (except, of course, the king of Sweden) was surprised when the dice fell apart. Apparently, Olaf had performed this "miracle" several times before, and repeated it several times afterward. Be warned: though this trick won Olaf considerable real estate and a reputation for saintliness, clumsy use of cheat dice is liable to win you only the enmity of your gaming peers.

Though loaded dice seem to have been the ancients' way of circumventing the laws of chance, resistance to a random universe has good company in the twentieth century. Albert Einstein never fully reconciled himself with the consequences of quantum mechanics, summing up his discomfort in the now well known phrase, "God does not play dice."

But have no fear! Latter-day astrophysicist Stephen Hawking has come to the rescue of spiritual gamers everywhere when he remarks of black holes, "Not only does God play dice, he sometimes throws them where they cannot be seen."

In other words, God has one heck of a GM screen.

Hawking also has this to say, "All evidence indicates that God is an inveterate gambler and that He throws the dice on every possible occasion."

Therefore, in the spirit of the ultimate roll model, go forth, and roll the bones!

Pyramid Review

EABA

EABA Universal RPG



Published by [Blacksburg Tactical Research Center](#)

Written by Greg Porter

150 page PDF download; \$12

EABA joins the ranks of electronic-only publications. For \$12 you get a 150-pages PDF document, which comes in both color and grayscale versions (the latter for easier printing). It can be purchased at [Wizard's Attic](#) or from [Hyperbooks](#). For a few extra bucks, it can be bought on a mini-CD, which is also available from the above sites, and at some retailers.

EABA's 150 pages are in a two-column format. The document is fully color-coded, hyper-linked, and indexed, with information tags to provide other notes. It is divided into nine sections. Each section starts with a full-color art plate of good computer-modeled cyberpunk art. There is little other interior art.

EABA works under an Open Supplement License (with terms included in the book). The full text can be found on BTRC's site, but is basically an agreement allowing anyone to publish supplements using the *EABA* rule set, as long as they don't reproduce the *EABA* rules.

BTRC's site includes free extras for *EABA*, including blank reference sheets, conversions for *CORPS*, *3G3*, *Timelords*, *d20*, and *GURPS*. There are also several alternate, color printouts for the cover sheet for use in whatever binder one keeps their *EABA* printouts.

Yes, *EABA* does stand for something. No, it's not found in the text of *EABA* or on the BTRC page. Mr. Porter only hinted that it did stand for something, until recently. Someone finally guessed it correctly -- the *End All Be All RPG* -- and Greg confirmed it. Apparently it was his in-house working title (and goal), and decided to keep the acronym as the game's title.

EABA is the latest game system to come from the Blacksburg Tactical Research Center. It is a universal system with a point-based character creation process. It is setting independent, and as such doesn't come with one. *BTRC* has published one setting for the system, *Ythrek*, has two more in the works, and is working on licenses to use *EABA* with some already-published game worlds.

Those familiar with other BTRC products, like *CORPS*, *Time Lords*, or *Guns, Guns, Guns*, will find many of *EABA's* mechanics familiar, at least in concept. But there are some stark contrasts.

Meshing playability with detailed rules has always been an issue for RPG systems. It is easy to create a system that is ultra-detailed, but this can make it tedious to play. It is also easy to make a system so macro in scope that there is effectively no rules and thus no consistency or reason. *EABA* elegantly walks at the crossroads of these two design philosophy extremes, creating a rule set that is extremely easy to play and learn, but is solid enough to handle nearly every situation in a realistic and consistent manner. The game takes a more "meta system" approach than other BTRC designs, but incorporates the strong technical concepts of its predecessors.

While the system is based firmly in the concept of realism, *EABA* is quite flexible. It handles the range from gritty, low-level, struggling characters to superheroic, cosmic avengers within its basic framework. Where some universal systems have trouble dealing with one end of the spectrum or the other, *EABA* handles both without the need to add new tables, charts, or rules.

EABA characters use familiar physical and mental attributes -- Strength, Agility, Awareness, Health, and Will -- that govern the character's abilities and influences skills. Fate is the sixth attribute, and is described as "The ability to twist the natural order of things to your will." Fate is a wild card attribute that can be used to represent magical power, honor, sanity, psionics, or any other genre-specific ability doesn't fall under the auspices of the other attributes. By default it is used as luck, able to modify rolls in the favor of the PC. In this manner, it becomes harder to use (pressing your luck), as an adventure progresses.

Characters are built with a pool of Attribute and Skill points. Ranges are given for making low normal to superheroic PCs. These points are also used to purchase Traits and Powers. Traits are characteristics that help define a character, modifying their abilities by adding dice, subtracting dice, or granting other gifts. The Trait list is full, if not extensive. But **EABA** works on the premise that most advantages are similar in function, adding or subtracting from task rolls. For Traits that add to particular die rolls, like Fortes and Weaknesses, how they work is explained but it is left to the GM and player to decide what exactly the modifier is applied to.

For those desired affects not covered under another Trait, there are some catch-alls like Unusual Background and Gifted. These allow PCs a wide variety of abilities. With only 8 pages of Traits, **EABA** still covers a wide framework of abilities that allow (or require, depending on your point of view) the GM and player to easily craft them into any campaign with little or no effort.

The list of skills that comes with **EABA** is only a couple of pages, giving a brief description of the skill, appropriate specializations, and the governing attribute. The list is pretty short, especially since it's an electronic publication and thus "page count" isn't as much an issue. But the list gives a good start for coming up with genre specific skills, and GMs are encouraged to allow players to buy what ever reasonable skills they'd like their PC to have. Being a universal system, and as each genre will have its own skill sets, the lack of an extensive skill list is not a major issue.

The common framework concept used throughout **EABA** also applies to the Powers. Powers are used to represent anything from spells to cyberware to super powers, and can be used to generate abilities not covered by Traits. Though a decent list of spells is included, **EABA** builds its powers by first determining the desired result and selecting appropriate power modifiers to get there. For example, to make a Fireball, one might add the Ranged, Lethal Damage, Explosive Effect, and 5-second casting time modifiers. Each modifier affects the difficulty of using the power.

The modifiers include everything from damage type, range, information, resistance, duration, time to cast, and several other factors. There are some other catchall modifiers, like Special Effect and General Penalties to fill the corners. The system is easy to use, comprehensive, and its flexibility is one of the areas where the **EABA** system most shines. Powers are also marked to indicate how unbalancing they may be in a campaign. This provides some guidance to a GM when deciding just what powers to allow.

EABA uses an open-ended d6 task system, rolling a number of d6 against a difficulty number depending on the task, conditions, and other appropriate modifiers. Once the difficulty level is set, the character rolls and takes the best three results. The number of dice is determined by the key attribute, applicable skills, specializations, and Traits. While open-ended, the maximum number of dice one can expect to roll is about 8d6, but the skill ranges for most average characters is going to be around 4 to 6.

One Trait used in **EABA** to simulate super characters or racial abilities allows characters to keep more than the best three results to add to the total, putting them far above the human norm. This can apply to specific skills, attributes, or to the whole character.

EABA also comes with a universal chart to use as a guide to modify difficulties of tasks. By cross-referencing things like distance, size, movement, and time, a final difficulty number can be determined for nearly any task. It is noted this chart needs to be used with some common sense. The chart is a generalization; its progression gets a bit askew at the very extreme ends, but easily covers most situations.

Like the rest of the **EABA** system, combat is detailed but easy. Combat is divided into Basic and Advanced rules, but uses only 8 pages in which it covers nearly every needed aspect of combat. Initiative is a function of the skill used, and

there are enough PC options to allow for one's tactics to directly influence combat without being bogged down.

EABA uses no hit points. Instead it keeps track of hits taken, with every so many hits resulting in injury penalties that progressively subtract dice from all character action rolls. Healing and recovery is a function of injury type, technology level, and skill rolls.

Weapon attributes allow for a wide variety of weapons without having a long list of stats. Ammunition and armor is rated against certain attacks, increasing or decreasing the damage for inappropriate damage types. This includes things like blunt weapons against flexible armor, primitive armor against bullets, or armor piercing munitions. There could have been a little more detail into different ammunition types, allowing a wider range of effects (modifying armor values against primitive or more types of advanced ammo), but the system can easily handle house rules for them.

The last part of EABA covers being a GM, Minutia, and the Gear. The GM section has several good tips about GMing in general, with advice on running games, creating campaigns, game master mistakes and tips, how to handle various player styles, and PC advancement. It also has a table of the 36 plots, useful for making adventures.

The Minutia covers other things such as temperature, weather, poison, technology levels, and exertion effects, as well as a mass combat system. It also includes a simple-but-comprehensive vehicle creation system. It is streamlined so as not to need any in-depth equations, but detailed enough to create most general vehicle types (a short list of common vehicles for each era is included) and their weaponry. The technology level of the construction affects the final values. An **EABA** expansion called *Stuff!* is in the works that will allow GMs to make all manner of vehicles, weaponry, and animals.

The gear section is relatively short, but includes most gear a PC would need depending on the campaign type. Weapons and armor are divided by technology level, but is vague (laser pistol, heavy revolver, power armor etc) being a universal system.

But, sadly, there is no bestiary! Not even a basic one. Templates for an attack dog and a horse are available for free from BTRC's site that provides some minimal guidance on how to make other animals. No full list of every animal type or dungeon denizen is needed, but not providing a basic list of common animals used in play, even with the most general attributes, is a surprising omission. As guard dogs and horses are probably two of the most common RPG animals, the free extras alleviate this somewhat, but not fully. It has been indicated that *Stuff!* will include how to make animals as well as vehicles and weapons, and will hopefully include a short bestiary.

--Aaron Kavli

Pyramid Review

Gamemastering Secrets, 2nd Edition



Published by [Grey Ghost Press, Inc.](#)

By Aaron Rosenberg, with various contributors and *Dork Tower* cartoons by John Kovalic

176 b&w page hardback; \$34.99

Gamemastering advice is never in short supply, but advice with generic applications such as those in *Robin's Laws of Good Gamemastering* don't see print often. Usually it's a specific *GM's Guide to RPG #2001*, or an article buried somewhere on the Internet. Grey Ghost Press, Inc. has brought one of the broad-based volumes back for an encore, Aaron Rosenberg's *Gamemastering Secrets*, and this time he has several notables from the gaming industry riding shotgun to supplement his counsel with short pieces that look at specific subjects in greater depth.

The bulk of the book is Rosenberg's personal observations about the GM's position and duties in a game. It's mostly a primer on refereeing, telling the reader all the things the average roleplaying book doesn't have space to tell the fledgling GM. It's arranged in the same order as the preparations one takes (or should take) for starting a new game. There are some quick-start tips to begin with, but it then walks step-by-step through organizing the experience.

He starts with the building blocks, like the terms common to roleplaying and the genres available, and then develops the activity. Who will be your players? What do they want from the game? What system will serve you best? Where do you play? Once he's given you some grounding in the hobby and the prep work is done, he gets the action rolling. He discusses getting the party together (and keeping them there) long enough that they may concentrate and find out what the new setting is all about.

The bulk of Rosenberg's section is on the game itself. All the pitfalls GMs cringe to think of are here: What do I do if a player doesn't show up to a session? How do I keep track of everything? Should I kill PCs, or fudge the results? How do I convince them to get anchovies on the pizza? Will they fight with each other? What if they fight with me?

Finally, when the referee is ready to end the adventure, he offers advice on how to tie things up in a neat little package -- or, if he'd rather, a not-so-tidy package so the game can live on with new adventures or a changed focus. GMs see how to bring things to the moment of dénouement and make everyone involved enjoy it.

Once he has had his say, Rosenberg gives up the podium to a host of top-notch talent who discuss several subtopics. There are articles about the people involved in games, including kids (Sam Chupp), women (Hilary Doda), and beginners (John Nephew). Moderating the in-game counterparts and concepts gets the treatment from Steven S. Long (making sure characters follow the game's underlying reality), Lee Gold (NPCs), John R. Phythyon, Jr. (villains), and Steven Marsh (treasure).

Some articles follow the creation process. Readers are tutored on making maps (Ann Dupuis), settings and worlds (James M. Ward), and characters (Ross Winn). More behind-the-scenes material covers research (Kenneth Hite), stirring up an overly formulaic game (Larry D. Hols), fixing one that isn't working (Lester Smith), making improvisation work for you (Jean Rabe), keeping track of all the myriad plot pieces (Mark Simmons), and the issue of trust (Frank Mentzer). Finally, there's an informative introduction on running games at conventions by Matt Forbeck.

A lot of the articles and text are explanatory only; you'll find the whys and wherefores of getting the job done, but on the whole there isn't much here to inspire the gamemaster. It's functional material, but with a few exceptions -- Steven

Marsh's article on treasure, Jean Rabe's pointers on winging it -- it won't kick-start the imagination. On the other hand, the guide is utterly exhaustive, covering just about everything that's ever been a problem for a gaming group, and some of the items -- like Ken Hite's research article -- may shake up how you think the pros do it.

The artwork is almost wholly composed of cartoons from John Kovalic's popular *Dork Tower* series (there are also some graphic samples in Ann Dupuis' map-making entry). Any long-time fan will note they're repeats, but they are viciously on-target and terribly funny. The book itself is a sturdy item, hardbound with heavy stock. With five pages at the end dedicated as dreaded "Notes" pages it's easy to question the book's overall value, but if it falls into the needy hands of a greenhorn GM, that extra space and the heavy-duty construction are going to come in handy.

Gamemastering Secrets is an invaluable tool for anyone new to the hobby who doesn't want to leap over all the hurdles most veteran GMs tripped on as they refined their style. For anyone who's been at this a while, most of the advice is mechanical and sounds old hat. There are a few gems hidden in the pages, and it never hurts a gamemaster to top it off, but the biggest audience by far will be the newbies seeking to avoid, or make the most of, the mistakes to which their predecessors fell prey, and the teaching staff here is hard to beat.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Unexpected the Expected

During a conference for a now-defunct comic line, creator Mark Wheatley once said, "Our job is to give the readers what they want, but not what they expect."

Yes, the comic line is defunct . . . that's beside the point. Don't let it distract from the fact that this is some Darn Good Advice. But what does it mean, and how does it apply to gaming?

The second part should be obvious: Replace "readers" with "players", and we're set to go.

So what does it mean to give players what they want, but not what they expect?

Well, break it down into the two parts:

What players want: Players want lots of things. Most of these are related to the current goals of the game ("Kill Vlad the Whack!"), the goals of the characters ("Become a powerful sorcerer") or the goals of the players ("Wouldn't it be neat to meet one of the Great Wyrms mentioned in the sourcebooks?").

What players expect: Usually players have preconceived notions of how they expect certain scenes to resolve.

- *Kill Vlad the Whack:* "You deliver a final triumphant blow, and Vlad falls over in a lump, dead."
- *Become a powerful sorcerer:* "And thus, after much adventuring, you had enough experience in the world and training within the College to become a mighty mage."
- *Meet a Great Wurm:* "You enter the cavern of the Great Wurm. His giant form sits atop a hoard of treasure; with infinite wisdom, patience, and power he raises his head to contemplate you."

Now, the problem is that giving the players what they expect is, on some level . . . well, boring. After all, if a two-hour scene plays out exactly like the players were expecting it to, then what was the point of the two-hour scene? Couldn't the players have just left the scene in their brains, and spent that time playing Xbox? (This is, as an aside, often my problem with many summer movies; when the entire movie plays out exactly as I had extrapolated from watching the trailer, I wonder why the movie has stolen my money and a few hours of a perfectly good summer day.)

On the flip side, if you don't give the players what they want (at least sometimes, on some level), then the players will grow annoyed, and probably not have any fun. Exposing your optimistic, hopeful players to Tales of Angsty Limb-Mangling Sorrow and Woe (Part XLIV) will probably result in some empty seats around the gaming table.

Okay; so how do you find out what the players want? Well, that's generally pretty easy: Ask them. Or even listen to them *without* asking; players are well-known for their tendency to rattle off their wishes between scenes, between sessions, in line at McDonald's, and so on. ("I can't *wait* 'til I get my own spaceship, 'cause then I'll be able to travel the jumpweb and fight pirates! <ba-CHEW! ba-CHEW!>" "Er, that's nice. But it seems an inappropriate thing to say at a wake . . .") If the players happen to be more reticent, then coming up with the ever-popular "short-term goals/long-term goals" sheet for them to fill out may be a solution.

So what does it mean to say "Give the players what they want, but not what they expect?" Simply, find a way of fulfilling their wants (or seeming to) without doing so in a way they have in mind. For example, one of my favorite tricks in gaming is the front-door villain. This is the bad guy who commits all manner of atrocity - generally spread out over many adventures - so that the characters (and players) *really* want to get this guy. They're using every trick they have to track him down; they're making plans; they're frothing at the mouth to catch him. And once the heroes are good and riled - and preferably timed with some PC statement like, "We've *got* to find this fiend!" - I'll have the bad guy show up at the heroes' door . . . completely non-threatening, seemingly unarmed, and wanting to talk.

This generally turns the ant-farm world of the heroes upside down. Whatever they *thought* they were going to do is now turned on its ear. In a second they are forced to turn their attention from "find this guy" to "deal with this guy" . . .

and it's almost guaranteed they don't have any plans for how to do the latter.

Of course, this technique only really works if 1) the bad guy has some good reason for being there (or otherwise can't be affected by the heroes), and 2) the GM is willing to accept any consequences. (I would say, "if the GM is prepared for any contingency," but I recognize that no gaming reality has ever survived contact with players, and they have the ability to come up with ideas I never even *considered*. I'm still waiting to pull this trick at some point, and have the heroes capture the front-door villain, give him a milkshake, and embark on their own reign of terror in the guise of that bad guy.)

Some possibilities I've used or considered in the past:

- The bad guy is there to ask for help or protection. (This can either be genuine or part of a further plot.)
- The bad guy is there to demand terms, or otherwise just chat. (He either has a very good escape/survival plan, or is the pawn of a *larger* bad guy . . . and is thus expendable.)
- The bad guy is there as a "suicide" action (again, furthering some other plot . . . or because he recognizes the futility of waiting for the heroes to come to him, and wants to have the final confrontation on his terms)
- The bad guy is there as a repentant (because he is genuinely sorry, he is feeling the heat from the heroes' actions, or - again - he's furthering some plot)

Regardless of how the scenario plays out, the players have gotten what they wanted ("get the bad guy") but not what they expected. Oh, and as a tip to any GMs looking to use this idea . . . *always* prepare for the possibility that the PCs will just kill the bad guy.

(As an aside, I was both pleased yet saddened to see this idea used in a popular 1995 movie . . . pleased because it's nice seeing an idea up on the big screen, and saddened because I'm guessing that most Hollywood screenwriters probably make a smidge more than most gaming writers. But I digress.)

Okay; so let's look back on our examples above and see how we can give the players what they want, but not what they expect.

- *Kill Vlad the Whack*: "You deliver a final triumphant blow, and Vlad falls over in a lump. He raises his head in a dying action and says, with a half-smile, "Thank you." (Was Vlad just released from some kind of curse . . . a curse that may now affect the heroes, or otherwise become a plot they must unravel? Was Vlad's death the catalyst for some larger, more evil plot? Or was he truly repentant; and if so, what does this say about the nature of forgiveness and redemption in the gaming world?)
- *Become a powerful sorcerer*: "You awaken in a village. The sky is a darker shade of red than any you have ever seen; as you cast a simple light spell to gather your bearings, a villager shouts out, 'What is that?!?' After a brief conversation, you realize that magic is unknown here; with the secrets you know, you are probably the most powerful person on this world . . . but you also have no idea how to get home." (The character *is* now a powerful sorcerer, and gets to enjoy the prestige and responsibility that implies . . . but he can also make heroic efforts to get home, and the game doesn't need to worry about the implications of a too-powerful being. And what if there is *another* magical traveler who ends up on the new world?)
- *Meet a Great Wyrms*: "The young girl approaches you; from afar she seems to be holding some kind of pet, like a lizard. But as she approaches, you recognize she is holding some kind of tiny dragon. Yet even that is wrong, you quickly realize, as you quickly recognize the sigil on his chest that marks him as one of the Great Wyrms. He raises his tiny head and says, with infinite wisdom, patience, and power, yet with an infinitely wounded dignity and a somewhat squeaky voice, "I . . . need your help." (The PCs get to meet a Great Wyrms . . . but in a very unusual circumstance. What has the power to shrink a Great Wyrms? How can the heroes help? And what will the rewards be if they succeed . . . and would those rewards be greater than having a miniature Great Wyrms as a pet?)

One of the nice things about toying with the player's expectations is that, after a while, they come to expect the unexpected. And at that point, you can do anything . . . including whatever the players would have expected in the first place! Vlad falls over dead; you become a powerful sorcerer; the Great Wyrms is mighty and proud. Yes, sometimes the best "plot twist" in getting what you wanted can be no twist at all.

Especially when you weren't expecting it.

--*Steven Marsh*

With this Power Ring, I Thee Wed

by Brian Rogers

So your superhero PC has scraped up enough time in his action-packed life to find [a little romance](#). He's steeled up his courage, honed from years of battling megalomaniacs and mobsters, to do it. Take the plunge. Enter the final frontier. Become an honest man.

Tie the knot.

So now what? If you as GM or your players are a little confused about what to make of this fabulous opportunity, you just have to turn back to your source material: Comics have used the act of getting married as an extended subplot for decades, spinning out any number of engagements becoming I Do's. This article, just like all the "Planning A Wedding" books, will take you step by step through the twists and turns of getting married -- just with an eye towards which tux goes with a shoulder holster and whether the bride's veil officially counts as a mask.

Popping the Question

"Jean, I've meant to ask for some time . . . do you have any . . . ah . . . secrets you've never told me?"
-- Ray (the Atom) Palmer, *Justice League of America* #155

Before we can start planning the wedding, the prospective bride and groom need to get over the first hurdle of actually agreeing to do this. The proposal is a big moment -- it's the point where a standard romantic subplot changes into something that can include the rest of the players, and perhaps alter the entire campaign. You'd be a fool to let it slip past. How you handle it depends on how you've handled the romantic subplot so far.

If there are secrets in the couple, where one is not aware that the other moonlights as a globetrotting spy, the proposal should be the impetus to start resolving those issues. Start right when the hero is making the proposal by forcing issues of identity -- a crisis emerges, a communicator beeps, a signal flashes across the city, and a decision must be made. Marriage is an institution based on trust, and by moving towards it the player has signaled a willingness to have his PC get into more trouble for lying. Eventually, the fiancée will find out (either because the hero comes clean or makes one mistake too many) and that moment of revelation is not one to be lightly passed over, as it signals a fundamental shift in the relationship, perhaps threatening to end it all together.

If the relationship to date has been a tangled or Byzantine one, the proposal is just the start of more angst. Bring back old romantic interests just before the PC decides to pop the question. Have questions about the fiancée's identity or validity come to the fore shortly after the ring is accepted. Don't do anything to make the proposal difficult -- well, any more difficult than it is in real life -- because the fun comes from making the PC question the choice. Does he really love her even with his old flame back in the picture? Is he really as perfect as he seems, or is there something sinister? Again, this is all an issue of trust, but rather than the PC getting the fiancée to trust her, it's a matter of trusting the fiancée to be both honest and right.

One of the advantages of the engagement is as an escape clause: player and GM have a way to back out of the plot before it starts. The player can start the subplot, realize he doesn't like where it's going and call an end to it -- the GM may even reset things back to before the proposal occurred, with them agreeing to keep seeing each other. As GM you can have the NPC back out if you don't like what it's doing to the campaign. While game weddings aren't as complicated as real life, it can be enough of a hassle that you should appreciate the ability to just end it without damaging the game.

What follows is a list of things that need to be done before a wedding (in roughly the order people do it) and how they can be used for heroic plot hooks.

Religion

"What do you think you're doing? You can't injure m--Argghhhh! It's not possible!"

"Don't you get it? Weren't you listening? 'We are gathered here today in the site of God!' Maybe those aren't just words!"

-- Mephisto & Bruce Banner, *Hulk #418*

In the at-best-vaguely-Unitarian world of comics, weddings are half of all religion (the other half being funerals). It's one of the few times we gather all of our friends into a religious structure. If you've been ignoring the issue of religion in the campaign until now, the wedding is a good time to bring it up. The bride and groom should have religious discussions before the day, if only to decide who's officiating. Off screen or on, it should make the player think about the PC's religious beliefs, which could springboard to new plots.

If this *is* a religious occasion, the ceremony is a good time to bring up or close out any religious/mystical plots you have brewing. Maybe the vampire is revealed by his inability to enter the church, or the unstoppable creature of the nether depths attacks and is repulsed by the heroes in the house of God. Again, this isn't for everyone, but if you start the mystical threat in the same session with the proposal, you can gracefully conclude it as the big event at the big event for a nice feeling of symmetry. There's even a celebratory party planned for after the battle!

Select Attendants

"Listen, Alan -- since Doiby came here via space warp all the way from Galaxy 882, I'd feel better about it if he took over as Best Man."

-- Jay (The Flash) Garrick, *Infinity Incorporated Annual #1*

The wedding part is the best way to drag the rest of the PCs into the wedding subplot. After all, if Omniman trusts his life to the Mountain Man, who better to be best man? Have some fun with selecting the wedding party for bride and groom, tracking how NPCs will react to being asked or skipped for the honor. This can lead to sour feelings in real life so you may not want to push the issue, but having the former sidekick get in a snit about not being the best man, or the demanding, tantrum-prone boss being honored to do a reading has a lot of potential.

If some members of the wedding party are famous, you can bet that the media will be scrutinizing the others to figure out why *they* were chosen. This means either wearing masks with the dress or tux (which looks extremely dorky) or finding some way of explaining to the press how the PCs know one another without blowing the secret ID. If most of the wedding party are heroes, what about the ones who aren't? ("Mountain Man, this is Chester, Alice's brother and a tax attorney. Chester, this is the Mountain Man, ruler of the Grizzly Republic.") Having a civilian among heroes makes for good comedy or a convenient liability. What if the normal person is the only one not in on the secret IDs? Fittings can be fun if everyone's trying to hide costumes or weapons from the unsuspecting future in-law.

Sometimes attendants will be coming from far away or have obstacles to their arrival. Getting your nearest and dearest together can open up lots of adventures. Sure, he's willing to be an usher, but he was just caught. Spying. In China. If sending messages to your old teammate -- now Magistrix of the 853 century -- is a problem, having her show up as a bridesmaid might be tricky. If you ever wanted to send your PCs somewhere, have them revisit old stomping grounds or revive retired characters, getting together a wedding party is a good hook.

Announce Engagement

"As leader of the Fantastic Four, and perhaps more importantly, as a man deeply and hopelessly in love, I'm delighted and honored to announce that Susan Storm and I are engaged . . ."

"To call it a Bombshell hardly did it justice."

-- Reed Richards and Phil Sheldon, *Marvels #2*

Making an announcement to the papers is traditional. This has some repercussions for famous heroes (or anyone in the public eye, for that matter). When the paparazzi kicks into high gear, it gives you plenty of chances for plot hooks. If the hero has any secrets, he can expect keeping them to be harder with a story-hungry press present. Now is the time to introduce society columnists digging for the scoop, caterers fighting to get their name attached to the wedding of the decade, the bride's hair style becoming the fad of the moment and the Entertainment Now! news van parked in front of HQ looking for just a quick interview.

Even if the heroes aren't famous (or the identities that are getting married aren't), making the announcement is a great opportunity for the GM to bring back old supporting cast members. Drag back NPCs that you haven't used in years to extend their congratulations or try and finagle invitations. Weddings are social occasions, and the society in your game are your NPC supporting cast. Once the announcement is made trot them out, if only to reacquaint your players with them before they show up at the wedding.

This can all be background, or you can make it the A plot: What if a foolish villain has grabbed someone with the "Spy Wife" look and is now holding a hostage whose only connection is she looks like your betrothed? What if the EN! crew has been replaced by evil-doers looking for a way past the base's impregnable security? A puff piece could turn into "if it bleeds, it leads" if the heroes let their guard down too much!

Hire the Professionals

The wedding couple are going to need a lot of professionals -- caterer, band/DJ, photographer, hall rental people, and so on -- to make the wedding happen. That costs time and money. The hero will have new financial concerns and lots of appointments that he'll have to miss or leave early when the hypersonic Omni-signal goes off. As with the ever-present news crews, professionals are great ways to slip adversaries into the wedding or reception. If you don't want to introduce too many new NPCs for this, just add one: the generic colorful wedding planner. Lavish attention on this guy or gal to make him the foil for every wedding problem from then on. At which point, all of the hero's (and player's) frustrations will have a face . . . a helpful face that costs thousands and may be infiltrating ninja in with the wait staff, but a face nonetheless.

Officiant

One way or another the wedding will need an officiant, and that's another NPC. Several religions require pre-wedding counseling, which may be a blast to play out. Others require active conversion before consenting to the ceremony -- a rich vein for character development. If you don't want to bring religion into it too much just gloss over this bit: there are plenty of Justices of the Peace or religious officials who are happy to officiate after a cursory interview and a small check. Alternately, you could reveal that an existing PCs or NPCs is allowed to perform marriage. Having Amazonia, priestess of Venus, officiate lends color and ties another PC into the plot for the big day.

Invitations

Quick -- make a list of every NPC who's ever appeared in your game. Now scratch off the ones who are irrevocably dead or have actively tried to kill the bride or groom. What's left is the list of people who will be expecting invitations. If the PC is the slightest bit famous, restore half of the "tried to kill" list. In short, running the wedding may turn into a logistical nightmare. Juggling that many NPCs on the big day can be enough to make you want to elope, and your PC isn't even the one getting married!

Since you have some lead time on this, slowly reintroduce NPCs over the course of the engagement, tracking which ones the players like best. When the big day comes, focus on those characters. No one actually talks to everyone at their wedding, so named-but-unnoticed NPCs are appropriate. Look through the list and decide how these NPCs interact to give you an idea of the reception: Will the thief and police chief behave like adults or will a gunfight erupt during the first dance? Will the Magistrix be willing to sit with the team's lovable-but-common ear-wiggling mailman? (For extra terror, have the players design a seating chart.)

Blood Test, Marriage License

A minor item in real life, but a wonderful opportunity for the GM to stress the style of the relationship. If the hero is a mutant or alien, will that turn up in the blood test? (Oh, they swear it doesn't, but can you trust them?) What if the hero has been zeroed out of the world computers, or the fiancée has no birth history? What if romantic rivals keep the hero from getting the blood test done, or render the license invalid? This is the main legal hurdle to getting married and opens the door for identity and trust issues one last time before the big day.

Stag Parties/Showers/ etc.

"Nick said an Ecdysiast! I thought that was a magician!"

"Nooo . . . an ecdysiast is a stripper."

-- Captain America and Bruce Banner, *Incredible Hulk* #417

People love throwing parties for the bride and groom. There's the bridal shower and the stag party, and maybe a Jack & Jill Shower and a bachelorette party. But people sometimes don't coordinate, so you can expect two or three of each. In a game sense, these parties are wonderful plot opportunities: the stag party thrown by two maverick cops and a sorcerer for their spy buddy is sure to be one heck of a night on the town -- especially if they're dragging along the other usher, the bride's 16-year-old brother. The bridal shower held by the queen of the Amazons will no doubt have more interesting events than equating broken ribbons with newborn children, though who's to say that wouldn't be an accurate predication in that setting? ("Umm, Omniman, she broke 37 ribbons. 37. And your sidekick gave her lingerie that looks like my costume. Is there something I should know?")

If you'd rather explore the characters' personalities in these parties, give some thought to who's giving the party, and what gifts they're bringing. ("Huggy-bear, you threw me a bachelor party. You . . . shouldn't have. Really.") The choices of presents or advice highlights how the characters interact or can suggest new directions. At the very least, these parties are another thing that the hero will have to make time for, or duck out of if and when a crisis emerges.

The Big Day: Dealing with Crises, Dealing with Crashers

"Is something wrong? Some villain's on the loose? Someone needs my powers? What is it?"

-- Donna (Wonder Girl) Long (nee Troy), *Tales of the Teen Titans* #50

"Well, we've just invited ourselves to all of those weddings, and we're going to help ourselves to a minor fortune!"

-- Mirage, *Amazing Spider Man* #156

Normal people spend time at their wedding waiting for something to go wrong. When superheroes lead lives of danger, that gets multiplied to an absurd degree. Even if nothing happens at the wedding, you should have the players thinking that something could go wrong at any minute; after all, they're all in one place along with all of their dependents and perhaps some of their hunters. Something is almost certain to happen. Sure, the flash of light in the window might be a sniper rifle, but it's probably just the paparazzi looking for a front page photo. The roar may be another giant lobster attack, but it could be an old ally's spaceship showing up at the last minute. Keep them on their toes.

Here's a good rule of thumb: if you intend the marriage to work (for instance, the bride isn't really a fembot), don't mess up the ceremony. Give them their moment: the bride, the groom, the officiant and the I Do's. Have it be perfect and wonderful. You can mess with things a little before it, because those problems are just amusing anecdotes years later. After the ceremony you can have all heck break loose (that's what the reception is *for*, for crying out loud!), but give them that moment. You might give them the whole day, but after everything they've been through they deserve at least that.

They're heroes, after all.

Besides, they're probably going somewhere exotic on the [honeymoon](#). Imagine what you can hit the PC with there!

Final Thoughts

Before starting any subplot as lengthy as orchestrating a wedding, you should sit down with the player and figure out how he wants to handle it. The player is either initiating it (asking an NPC) or has the chance to nip it in the bud (turning down an NPC proposal) and may have a definite idea of what he wants. If he does, tailor your expectations around that. Wedding planning can be terrifying [in real life](#), and people may not want to go through all of that again in game. Work with your player and this will be a blessed occasion remembered with joy for all your days . . .

. . . or at least the sidekick will make a buck selling the home video of the PC punching out Lord Crustacean while wearing the wedding cake.

Bam! Pow! Ouch! Damage, Healing, And Fatigue For *GURPS* Supers

by Stephen Dedman

One of the problems with any superhero roleplaying game is gun control.

For example, Fantasy Games Unlimited's superhero game *Villains and Vigilantes* tried to solve this with characters who were incredibly difficult to kill, and guns that were wildly inaccurate, fired once or twice per fifteen-second combat turn, and did only slightly more damage than an average man's fist . . . which was so little damage that it was impossible to kill even an ordinary non-super with a single shot, though you *could* knock him out.

GURPS tends towards the other extreme, where guns are far more effective than in most superhero RPGs, and unless all of the player characters buy at least 30 points of Damage Resistance or similar defense, any zero-point thug with an AK-47 may still be a more than a match for them. However, if they do, they may also be immune to any other 5d attack, including other supers' fists or energy attacks. They can buy Damage Resistance or a similar defense "against bullets only," but although this is cheaper, it is even less realistic as a power and may require GM fiat on what is and is not a bullet (Prodd pellets? Cannonballs? Gyroc rounds? Gauss gun ammo? Rocket-propelled grenades?). Similarly, super-characters with high levels of ST may find that the most effective use for this is to reduce the recoil of high-powered firearms, enabling them to fire an assault rifle with one hand and a shotgun with the other, a la The Terminator. While this may fit a "realistic" campaign, it doesn't reflect the four-color world of many comics.

The "stun damage" rules in *GURPS Supers* are a better fit for the comics world, but as the books say, they're also totally unrealistic and require more bookkeeping. Fortunately, some of the Optional Rules for Wounds and Healing (p. CII150-158) can be adapted to make for more playable Supers and cinematic Martial Arts campaigns that better fit the comics and Hong Kong action movies. These modifications may also be appropriate for cinematic boxers or pro wrestlers, or even an Old West or Fantasy game where you want the obligatory tavern brawls to be harmless fun while the sword fights or shootouts remain lethal.

Firearm Accuracy

According to statistics compiled by the NYPD and FBI, 92% of all fire-fights occur within 20 feet, with only 6% out beyond 150 feet (sniper attacks). Nearly all NYPD officers killed in firefights were within 10 feet of their assailant, and most NYPD shootings occurred with gunman and target within seven feet of each other. 52% of these shootings took place in the dark, the average number of shots fired was four, and even at these ranges, only 11-16% of shots hit their target.

Oddly enough, a perfectly average *GURPS* character -- with no Guns skill, operating on default, firing a handgun at a man-sized target 6' away, in good lighting, and without taking time to aim -- has a 16.2% chance of hitting the target (25.9% with a shotgun). The problem in most Supers games is that Guns skill is cheap; half a point spent on the skill will increase that average character's chance of scoring a hit to 50% (62.5% with a shotgun) . . . and most NPC gunmen won't be operating on default.

There are a few ways around this. One is to assume that the majority of NPC gunmen have low levels (or none) in Guns skill or Fast-Draw, and may be using weapons in bad repair. After all, successful criminals will rely on Intimidation more often than combat.

Another is to use the rules for Flinch, Buck Fever, and Bullet Shyness (p. CII64). Buck Fever is particularly useful, especially if the super is an imposing or frightening figure: a negative modifier equal to the super's Reputation would be appropriate in many cases and would help explain the longevity of some famous super-normals. Faced with an opponent capable of a punishing ranged attack, many shooters will also be making pop-up attacks (p. B116) rather

than standing in plain sight.

Finally, don't forget penalties for bad light. Remember that many of the less invincible superheroes only operate at night. Superman is able to fly around by daylight wearing bright primary colors because bullets can't hurt him; the super-normal Batman works the dark alleys on the other side of town, wearing dark monochromes with a target over his well-armored vitals. For a character with Night Vision who obsessively patrols after dark, assume that there's a bad light penalty of 1d+1 at most times when he's active.

Blunt Trauma

To make the "Different Damage Types" rules on p. CII152 fit the Supers genre better without needing Stun points, change bullet damage from crushing to cutting. This is even easier to justify if you replace the word "cutting" with "tearing," as bullets tumbling through a body act more like a chainsaw than a fist or club: after all, gun enthusiasts talk about the "penetration" of different bullets and loads, and even in the comics, fists rarely leave entrance and exit wounds.

As this makes guns more, not less, lethal, it's a good idea to reduce bullet damage by 1 or even 2 points for every 1d of damage crushing damage listed: e.g. a Glock-17 or other pistol firing 9mm Parabellum would do 2d or 2d-2 cutting damage, and an M-16 would do 5d-5 (4d-2) or 5d-10 (2d).

One of the benefits of this is that most armor in *GURPS* worldbooks give the same level of protection against both cutting and crushing attacks, though often less against impaling. Therefore, the "real-world" armor that many superheroes are likely to wear will offer the approximately same level of protection against firearms. The Damage Types listed on the Defense Table (p. CI49), however, lists Cutting/Impaling attacks together, so a Super can buy a high level of defense against knives, swords, guns, and other lethal weapons that most comic-book superheroes prefer not to use, but still be vulnerable to another Super's fists (treat as a Major Vow, equivalent to "Use No Edged Weapons," or treat as part of a Code of Honor or Pacifism: Cannot Kill). Guns remain just as lethal against unarmored opponents, so you don't have to sacrifice realism.

Whether or not you use Stun Damage for crushing attacks in this system, the "shoot to kill" rule (p. CII150) is still useful as a means of making hand-to-hand combat less lethal . . . at least for the superheroes' targets. Whether or not metavillains use the same rules is up to them: NPCs with the "Villain's Code of Honor" (p. Su15) would probably do so except in response to a lethal attack.

If you want to make sword-fighting, musket fire and other low-tech combat more lethal, use the Infection rules on p. B134 for any wound that breaks the skin . . . but replace the HT +3 roll to avoid ordinary infection with HT plus the TL of the First Aid or any other medical attention the wounded character is likely to receive before septicaemia becomes obvious. Thus, an Ice Age hunter (TL0) would roll against HT +0, a medieval knight at HT +3, and a U.S. Civil War soldier at HT +5. (Up to TL6, surgeons were still famed for the speed with which they could remove potentially gangrenous limbs.) Feel free to tamper with these numbers in the interests of historical accuracy; many aspects of medical care were handled better at TL1 than in TL3 Europe. (Islamic medics of the time were much better, and the TL4 "renaissance" in science owed much due to the rediscovery of TL1 texts in Arabic translations.)

Fatigue

For long fights where characters blaze or slug away at each other, hoping for a critical hit or just slowly wearing each other down (very common in Supers combat where characters may have high DR or active defenses that make them almost impossible to hurt), modify the rules on p. B134. Instead of reducing applying fatigue after each "battle that lasts more than ten seconds", apply it to each character after HT actions. This will have negligible effects on combat between 'average' people, but will enable supers with high HT and normal Move to outlast ordinary foes. It will also mean that supers able to perform multiple actions in one turn (those with Move of 12+ and/or martial arts skills of 16+) are likely to drop with exhaustion sooner. Also, if a character is attacking and/or parrying with a weapon which has a Min ST which exceeds his own ST, add the difference to his fatigue points spent in that combat.

Healing

As an alternative to the Stun Damage rules, use the Flesh Wounds rules (p. CII151) -- but only for crushing damage. Alternatively or additionally, use the Advanced Healing System (p. CII154); crushing damage wounds may range from Superficial to Serious, but are never Critical unless a character has announced that he is "shooting to kill".

Also, as suggested on p. CI7, base hit points (and, optionally, Height and Weight) on ST, not HT. For super-strong Supers characters (a staple of the genre), this will make hit points cheaper than Damage Resistance. Even strong "normals" such as the Fox could have extra hit points without needing to pay the cost for Unusual Background.

This will also make characters with the Growth super-advantage (p. CI56) more "realistic" -- they'll have more hit points as they gain in ST, so wounds will proportionally do less damage (to a character with Growth/1, a 6" blade is merely a 3" blade, and a .44-calibre bullet becomes a .22). This rule is also useful for quickly designing creatures that are much larger or smaller than humans, as the GM will only have to work out (and remember) one figure for both ST and hit points.

All rolls to avoid unconsciousness, shock, and the like should still be made against HT, not ST; fatigue should also come from HT, not ST. Blow-through damage (p. B109) and general damage penalties (p. B126) should still be based on HT, but Automatic Death can be based on $-5 \times$ hit points, rather than HT (another advantage to having high ST-based hit points).

Of course, if a super-normal PC still insists on charging machine-gun nests with no protection except a belly-dancer costume and the Overconfidence disadvantage, there's not very much you can do to save her except using the "silly" rules on p. CII76. If even this doesn't work, just remember the old saying: Dice don't kill characters. People kill characters. People with dice just kill more of them.

Appendix Z: Vehicular Mayhem

by Jacqui Smith

Just a simple trip across town? It needn't be. Modern cities are full of potential troubles for unwary travelers. Of course, if the heroes are in pursuit of another vehicle, life can get *really* interesting. Some of these hazards are relatively minor, and only serve to add variety, or perhaps slow down the action so the bad guys have a chance to get away. Others are more serious, and may well stop the travelers dead in their tracks. Here are lists of possible hazards to be encountered on the roads of a modern city, which should be easily adaptable to cities from other periods. GMs may choose an event at random from the lists, or select a hazard appropriate to the situation.

Vehicular Problems

Note that many of these events are more probable with older or poorly maintained vehicles. A stolen vehicle may have faults a thief is quite unaware of.

- **Out of Fuel:** Somebody forgot to check the gas meter. Desperate drivers may try pushing the car to the nearest gas station.
- **Puncture:** You ran over something, you're not sure what. Or maybe you should have got these tires replaced a while back. In the worst case, somebody shot out your tires, and you don't know who. Or why.
- **Water Leak:** The cooling system's leaking, the car's over-heating. Steam is billowing out from under the hood. Better stop, now!
- **Oil Leak:** The engine's over-heating, and it may grind to a stop. You probably want to stop before it does.
- **Transmission Failure:** There will be a grunch. The wheels will lock. The car will attempt to stop and keep going at the same time. Make a driving roll.
- **Clutch Failure:** You can't change gear. You may be stuck in neutral, or in whatever gear you were in before the gear changer went away. It's time to stop and call the AAA.
- **Brakes Fail:** The brakes aren't working. You can't stop in a hurry, and if you're going downhill, you may not be able to stop at all. Make some driving rolls.
- **Bomb!:** You've just discovered that an explosive device has been planted in this vehicle. (Typical . . .)

Road Hazards

- **Road Works (Minor):** This usually involves work to the side of the carriageway. There are speed restrictions, but you can exceed them safely, unless other vehicles in front slow you down.
- **Road Works (Major):** This involves work on the highway itself. The road surface may be being repaired or replaced, and it isn't nice friendly tarmac any more. Should you exceed the recommended speed by more than 10 mph, you will need to make a driving roll to maintain control of the vehicle.
- **Goods on the Road:** It fell off the back of a truck. Now it's on the road ahead of you. It could anything from an empty cardboard box to a hazardous materials container, or a ton of logs!
- **Oil on the Road:** You'd better make your perception check to spot this hazard . . . and a driving roll if you fail, or you could be in for an interesting skid.
- **Bad Weather:** It's raining heavily. If it's winter, there may be hail on the way, or even snow. Visibility is bad, and you really want to slow down. Make driving rolls to maintain control of the vehicle if you insist on driving too fast for the conditions. Storms can lead to any of the next five hazards.
- **Fallen Tree:** You come screaming around the corner, and there it is. A fallen tree blocks the road. Maybe just part of the road, maybe the entire carriageway. Maybe the boys have arrived to take it away, and there's heavy machinery everywhere.
- **Slip:** Road? What road? A section of road has literally fallen away down the hillside or the road has been covered with a landslide. The road may be passable, just. Or it may not.

- **Power Lines Down:** A storm has brought the lines down. Do you want to trust to your skill that you can avoid them? If the lines touch the vehicle, it will most likely stop, all its electrical circuitry shorted out.
- **Ice:** It's very hard to see ice on the road, especially black ice. Black ice is dead smooth, and you can't drive on it, even with chains. You will skid. Make driving rolls to avoid worse consequences.
- **Snow:** It blocks the road. You need chains, or better still, a snowplow.
- **Dead Animal on the Road:** Could be anything from a cat to a deer. Maybe nothing to worry about or a major problem if you fail to avoid it. It gets really interesting if it's a protected species, and the ranger turns up wanting to know what happened.
- **Live Animal(s) on the Road:** Anything from a stray dog or cat (common enough in suburbia) to a herd of sheep or cows crossing (a strictly rural hazard).
- **Teenagers Playing Chicken:** Don't pretend they don't, because they do. Running into one of them is considered bad, and scores you a whole heap of paperwork at the very least.
- **Wandering Pedestrian(s):** Essentially the same problems if you run into one. Watch out for kids chasing balls onto the road.
- **Train Crossing:** The bells are ringing, the train's coming. Going to risk it?
- **Traffic Lights Malfunction:** The lights aren't working. The traffic is piling up. Maybe there's been an accident. Probably not yet, though. Going to risk it?
- **Toll Gates:** You're supposed to stop, and toss the money into the bucket. If you don't, they'll stop your vehicle. If you're in hot pursuit, they'll probably open the emergency lane. Probably.
- **Bridge Up:** The wings of the bridge are going up to allow boats to pass. Jumping bridges is something they only do in bad action movies.
- **Driver Check Point:** The nice policemen want to check your registration or test your breath to see if you've been drinking. Have you?
- **Road Block:** The police have set up a road block. Are they looking for someone? Has there been an accident? Or is the road ahead impassable?
- **Riot!:** The natives are revolting, and they're all over the road. Makeshift missiles are flying in all directions. Do you really want to go that way?
- **Fire!:** There is fire ahead. In urban areas it will probably be a building that's on fire. The road is blocked by emergency vehicles, and rubber-neckers line the sidewalks. In rural areas, it might be a forest fire.
- **Earthquake!:** It might be just a tremor, or a major quake. The road may crack right upon in front of you. There may be falling debris. This is California, right?
- **Flood!:** Your car is not a boat, and water over the axles is generally considered bad.

Involving Other Vehicles

- **Traffic Jam:** Probably the most common, and most annoying road hazard for heroes and villains alike. You're crawling along the motorway, and no matter how big and fast your vehicle is, you're stuck. Welcome to the frustration zone.
- **Accident Ahead:** A major accident can block the road for miles in both directions while it's cleared up. Of course, if you're first to arrive on the scene, you're into a whole new scenario right there.
- **Learner Driver:** Driving slowly and nervously, unsure of how to make the vehicle work, never mind how to avoid potential hazards.
- **Teenage Driver:** Driving fast and furious, he's absolutely sure of his own immortality.
- **Drunk Driver:** He's out of control, and he's all over the road . . .
- **Angry Driver:** Heard of road rage? This guy's mad at you, and you don't know why.
- **Motorcycle Gang on the Move:** They want the road, they want all of the road, and there's not much left for you. They also think they are a bunch of really tough guys.
- **Garbage Truck Ahead:** It's moving slowly, it takes up half the road (or all of the road if it's in an alley). It's picking up garbage, and there may also be runners picking up garbage sacks.
- **School Bus:** Either loading children, or dropping them off. Either way, it's quite possible that a small person will come running across the road.
- **Emergency Vehicle:** You hear the sirens. You're supposed to slow down and pull over to the side of the road. Do you?

- **School Ahead:** The bell just rang for end of school. The chaos near the school gates is unbelievable. And that's just the waiting parents.
- **Car Chase:** The police are in hot pursuit of a speeding driver. What happens when two vehicle pursuits intersect can only be imagined . . .

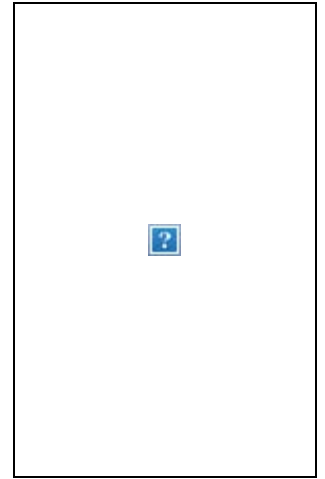
Pyramid Review

Hundred Kingdoms Official Boxed Game

Published by [BlackOrc Games](#)

Created by **Rick A. Jensen**

Boxed set; \$60



Hundred Kingdoms is a tabletop miniature wargame produced by BlackOrc Games.

According to the background, the Empire of Avalon has fragmented. Until now it was ruled by the divinely appointed Hand of God. The Prophets have decreed that a Warlord will emerge and seize the throne, and powers of the Hand of God and rule the kingdom. Warlords of the human Kingdom of Avalon, human Bushido Empire, ape-ruled Simian Empire, feline Panthera Tribe, and insects of the Hive all vie to be the Hand of God. *Hundred Kingdoms* lets you be one of those Warlords and fight for control of the empire.

The Hundred Kingdoms Official Boxed Game comes in a slip-covered cardboard box filled with miniatures (in large blister packs), rulebook, and foam packing peanuts. The box is not adequate to transport miniatures to a remote gaming location, but it does come crammed with contents.

It contains:

- A 44-page Rulebook
- One Kingdom of Avalon 197-point army
 - King Thomas Killian (King of Avalon)
 - One unit of 10 Avalonian Archers
 - One unit of 10 Templar Knights
- One Panthera Tribe 189-point army
 - Rashaka Leao (lord of the Panthera Tribe)
 - One unit of 10 Jaguar Archers
 - One unit of 10 Jaguar Spearmen
- Five 20-sided dice

You also do not need the boxed game to play; the rulebook is available as a free PDF download from the *Hundred Kingdoms* website. The rulebooks containing the army and unit statistics for the various armies -- Avalon, Bushido, Hive, Panthera, and Simiam -- are also available as free downloads. You need to register for their message forums to download, however.

The game could easily be played with a downloaded rulebook and individually purchased miniatures. However, since the boxed set costs \$60 and contains \$101.50 worth of miniatures (if purchased individually), the boxed set is both a good deal and a good place to start.

As far as the game itself, the rules are straightforward. They are very clear, well-written, and give solid and useful examples. The goal of the game is to defeat the enemy's Warlord in battle. If your Warlord falls in battle, your army disintegrates and you lose. Battles can be between more than two sides as well, and the rules adapt easily to three or four or more sided battles as easily as to one-on-one battles.

Actions are typical -- units can move, charge into melee, attack with missiles, use their special abilities (more on those below), and so on. Actions are limited by commands. Command units can give a limited number of orders per turn, allowing the owning player to move or otherwise use one unit per order. This makes command units very valuable,

and are targets worth attacking or defending vigorously. This makes building armies an exercise in balance between enough combat troops to win and having enough command actions to issue to those troops.

Combat is simple; each figure is rated for number of attacks, attack, and defense. The attacker rolls a number of dice equal to the number of attacking figures \times the number of attacks. Each die that turns up equal to or less than the Attack Rating (AR) is a potential wound on the defender. The defender rolls against the Defense Rating (DR) of the defending figures. Each die that turns up equal to or less than the DR is a successful block. Any excess wounds are applied to the unit. Units are rated for Hit Points (HP), and when enough HP are accumulated a figure is removed. This nicely differentiates rapidity of attack and power of attack and balanced them against the defensibility of the defender and ability to absorb damage. Units that take more than 50% casualties in a turn face a morale test; failure means they flee toward the edge of the board unless a hero or Warlord moves to rally them.

The special abilities of the units are well done and interesting. They vary from the Scouting ability of the Hive's Tyrminions (allowing them to seize ground well ahead of the army's deployment area) to the startling Stomp of the Simian Giant Gor (a gargantuan ape able literally shake units into inaction). Some units even have the ability Succession, allowing the unit to replace a fallen Warlord and letting you continue the fight when your Warlord is eliminated.

Advanced rules add in sorcery, weather, terrain and structures, and skirmish games for small individual-level battles. Most of these rules are given only a brief description in the rulebook, but are available as free PDF downloads on the *Hundred Kingdoms* website.

No discussion of a build-your-army miniatures game would be complete without an examination of the miniatures. They are detailed, well-molded, and above all very attractive. They are also eye-catching and include unusual and interesting miniatures -- Wuxia Warriors with posts to allow them to be posed either standing or doing a flying leap, massive apes, packs of cheetahs, flying insects, flying angels, Asian dragons, and even a huge ape gladiator. The miniatures stand on standard plastic slot bases, with the exception of the larger miniatures which have metal bases.

BlackOrc Games got some well-known sculptors, including Sandra Garrity (Reaper Miniatures) and Jason Weibe (Wizards of the Coast, Reaper), to sculpt its miniatures. Some are quite large -- the Simian Praetorian Guard stand a whopping 2" tall each. They do need to be painted, but painting guides and color pictures of all of the figures on the website make it easy to get them painted to table-worthy quality.

The cost of the miniatures are comparable to similar-sized and detailed miniatures from other companies, making building an army not inexpensive, but not a bank-breaking proposition, either. The figures are also interesting enough to be useful for non-*Hundred Kingdoms* players looking for odd creatures to fill out an RPG session or army in another miniatures game system.

It is worth mentioning that one miniature purchased along with the boxed set did come malformed (missing part of its sword arm). BlackOrc Games promptly replaced it, asking only that the mini be back so it could figure out what went wrong.

A miniatures wargame needs two things to succeed -- a well-supported line of miniatures and supplements, and a good base of fans playing the game. *Hundred Kingdoms* has both. BlackOrc maintains a very active website with a large player population and enthusiastic company representatives answering questions. While enough information on the various kingdoms to play them is available free, a line of full sourcebooks is planned that will include even more history and detail. Since all you actually need to play besides miniatures is available free of charge, the splatbook syndrome seems neatly avoided. Players wanting more information can buy it without everyone needing every book in order to stay competitive with their own army. Plus, new miniatures for the existing kingdoms and the possibility of more kingdoms being created can keep the game fresh and new.

The community of *Hundred Kingdoms* players seems likely to grow, and the game is enjoyable enough and the miniatures pretty enough to make it a hard purchase to resist. Most of all, the game plays quickly, and is *fun*. It is a good deal at the price it sells for, and the rulebook is worth downloading just to take a look at how well thought-out the game is.

--*Peter V. Dell'Orto*

Pyramid Review

Silver Age Sentinels -- d20 Edition

Published by [Guardians of Order](#)

Written by Stephen Kenson, Mark C. MacKinnon, Jeff Mackinstosh, and Jesse Scoble

336 b&w hardback; \$39.95

I was surprised when I found out that Guardians of Order planned to release a *d20 System* version of *Silver Age Sentinels*. I have been a fan of *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* and the Tri-Stat system for a long time (not to mention a fan of the *d20 System*), but I couldn't help but wonder how well a game built using it would translate to the *d20 System*. After spending several weeks with *Silver Age Sentinels - d20 Edition*, I am pleased to report that it's an excellent game, but I might just hide that *d20* logo on the cover when my *Dungeons & Dragons*-playing friends drop by to play.

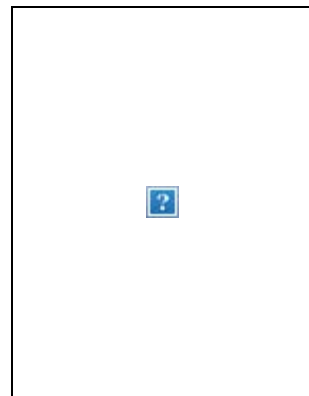
Silver Age Sentinels -- d20 Edition is a 336-page hardbound book with a color cover and black-and-white interior. The binding allows it to lay flat on the game table for easy reference. The book is divided into 12 chapters and four appendices. It also thankfully includes an excellent index. The interior art by Storn Cook and company looks great, even without the color of the Tri-Stat version's Deluxe Limited Edition.

Character Creation is an interesting blend of *d20 System* and Tri-Stat. You are first assigned a pool of power points based on what power level your GM has chosen for his game. These points are used to purchase all of your character's attributes and abilities. You generate ability scores using the standard guidelines from the *Player's Handbook* (You still have to pay for them with power points, which makes the task of rolling them a little silly). You then choose from one of nine new classes (Acrobat, Adventurer, Costumed Fighter, Costumed Wizard, Gadgeteer, Powerhouse, Psychic, Skulker, and Speedster). Starting skill points are based on a character's class and INT score, but the skill list and skill names are straight out of the Tri-Stat version of the game. At this point, you would expect to pick starting feats, but feats are entirely missing from *Silver Age Sentinels -- d20 Edition*. Instead, a character attribute system has been plugged in.

Character attributes are your character's special talents and superpowers. Attributes are purchased in ranks, which directly correspond to the Tri-Stat version's levels. Each attribute has a power point cost per rank based on the value of the attribute. Some character attributes can be tweaked with power modifier values (PMVs) which change the attribute's area, duration, range and/or targets. Each rank in a PMV costs a power point and allows you to personalize the attribute for your character. You can also purchase additional starting skill points with the Highly Skilled attribute and even increase your character's starting class level with the Highly Trained attribute. In addition to attributes, you can assign a variety of character defects to your character to enhance role-playing him (and to get bonus starting power points of course).

The majority of *Silver Age Sentinels -- d20 Edition's* content is identical to that of its Tri-Stat counterpart. This means you get the same excellent short history of comic books, the same list of sample NPC villains and heroes, the same Empire City campaign setting (which is basically New York City with the serial numbers filed off), the same campaign timeline and geographical overview of the world. You also get some well-written GM advice for running a superhero game and a nice selection of adventure seeds.

As you might have inferred from the opening paragraph, I'm not completely satisfied with *Silver Age Sentinels -- d20 Edition* as a *d20 System* game. It is less a *d20 System* conversion of *Silver Age Sentinels* than an attempt to adapt the Tri-Stat version to the *d20 System*. Throughout the rulebook there has been little or no attempt by Guardians of Order



to use typical *d20 System* terminology and mechanics. For example:

Objects in a typical *d20 System* game have a hardness, which determines how well they resist damage and hit points, which determines how much damage they can take before being destroyed. They also normally have a DC listed for the STR check required to destroy them.

In *Silver Age Sentinels -- d20 Edition*, objects have an armour rating (which works like the hardness score) and also hit points. No break DCs are listed and the mechanics for damaging them work a bit differently. This exactly mirrors how objects work in the Tri-Stat version of the game, but this raises the question: Why not use the term hardness and list break DCs? This is repeated throughout the rules. The authors have chosen to use as much of the Tri-Stat version of the game as possible and convert only where absolutely necessary.

What this means to you if you are a *d20 System* veteran is that you are not going to just step in and pick the game up right away. *Silver Age Sentinels -- d20 Edition* is essentially a new game system with new concepts and mechanics to learn. This doesn't make it a bad game (I think it's quite a good game), but it does mean you should make an informed purchase.

If you are looking for "*Dungeons & Dragons* in spandex," you might want to look elsewhere. Of course, you now (or will soon) have plenty of other choices. *Mutants & Masterminds* from Green Ronin, *Four Color to Fantasy* from Natural 20 Press, and *Deeds not Words* from Cryptosnark Games are three that I know about, and there are probably others as well. If you are looking for an attractive and well-written superhero RPG that includes features you enjoy like classes and levels, then *Silver Age Sentinels -- d20 Edition* is an excellent choice.

--Anthony Roberson

Pyramid Review

TransAmerica: One Step Ahead

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Created by **Franz-Benno Delonge**

\$24.95

One of the three finalists for this year's Spiel des Jahres Game of the Year award was *TransAmerica*. This latest boardgame from Rio Grande Games is about laying the first railroads across America in the 19th century. The aim is to lay a network that connects five different cities before anyone else can and avoid losing points. The player with the most points after a number of rounds will be the winner.

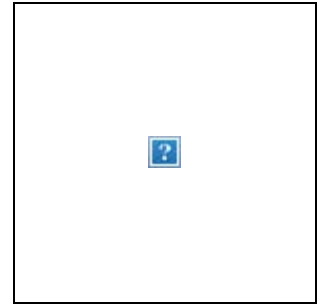
Designed for two to six players, *TransAmerica* is, like all titles from Rio Grande, beautifully packaged and equipped. The box contains:

- One game board
- 85 track pieces
- 35 city cards
- Six start markers
- Six locomotives
- One starting player card
- One set of the game rules

The board depicts all of the USA in full color, bar Florida south of Jacksonville. There are 35 are marked in five different colors, and divided into Northern, Eastern, Southern, Western, and Central regions. A regular triangular grid connects all of these cities. Where the lines of this grid cross mountain ranges or rivers, a double line marks the location of a tunnel or a bridge. At the top of the board is a scoring track that runs out of the engine house on the right hand side to the numbers 12 and down to one at the far left-hand side. There is a barrier immediately to the left of the "one" scoring space. The cards show the cities on the board and correspond to their colors. There are seven cities per color and region, but this is reduced to just five cities if only two or three players are playing the game. The track pieces are small lengths of black wood, similar to those used as road pieces in *Settlers of Catan*.

At the beginning of the game, the cards are separated into their colors and shuffled. Each player takes one card of each color, and these determine the cities they must connect with network of tracks. Each player's locomotive is placed in the engine house. One track piece is placed over the barrier marker at the end of the scoring track. On the first turn each player puts down their starter marker to indicate the beginning point for their network, which can be at any track junction or in a city. During a turn, each player can place two pieces of track on unoccupied single grid lines, or a single track piece on a double line. The track put down must connect to the player's start markers, or to his networks put down so far. Alternatively, the track can connect to a rival's network, enabling a player to use their rival's network as his own in later turns.

Once a player has managed to connect all five of his cities, he shows his five city cards to the other players and has won that round. The remaining players lose points for each section of missing track between their networks and their unconnected cities. For each negative point scored, a player's locomotive is moved down the scoring track. Rounds can also end when one player accidentally connects all the five cities of another or when all of the track pieces have been used. Both of these occurrences are fairly rare.



The board is cleared and the cards reshuffled in preparation for the next round. The starting card is passed to the next player and the new round is played as before. At the end of the second round, if the lowest scoring player still has four or more points, the barrier piece is moved from its starting position along the scoring track to the right until it is two full spaces away from the locomotive of the lowest scoring player. Several more rounds are played until at least one player scores enough negative points to force his locomotive past the barrier. Once this happens, the game ends and the player with the most points is the winner of the game. It is possible for several players to tie for the most points, in which case they are all declared to be the winners.

Although a nice-looking game, *TransAmerica* is ultimately disappointing. The player options are very limited and the outcome of the game is pretty much determined by distances between the cities indicated on a player's cards. The main problem is the complete lack of interaction between the players, who participate in the game all but independent of each other. This is especially so if there are just a few players. One method of improving interaction might be to make it as costly to connect one player's network to another as it is to lay track through a tunnel or over a bridge. This might be easier if the multi-colored road pieces from *Settlers of Catan* are used instead of the plain black ones in *TransAmerica*. Although aimed at players aged eight years old and up, even the youngest of gamers will quickly tire of this game. The older gamer will probably find his interest will last little more than a couple games. After the delight of titles [Tikal](#) and [Carcassonne](#), this is one game that is going to be collecting dust on the shelf.

--Matthew Pook

All Those Foreshadowing, Say I

One of the interesting things about both history and most good fiction is that events seldom happen without cause or reason. Usually, whenever something happens, there are clues; when we hear, for example, that some states are considering taking action against drivers who use cell phones, we have heard previously of the possibility that cell phones may cause auto problems. Or when war erupts, there have generally been rumblings of discontent or other incidents that make the act possibly shocking, but unsurprising. It's rare to see a newscaster say, "The United States is now at war with Latnavatia, a country that, until 20 minutes ago, no one even knew *existed!*"

Now, good fiction usually follows the same rules as the real world. Seldom is there a plot development or twist in "good" stories that isn't in some way telegraphed; it may be subtle, but (ideally) the audience will go, "Ahh . . . *that* makes sense" instead of saying, "Huh. *That* came from planet cheeseball."

(Just *once* I want to see a bad movie where someone says something dramatic and affecting like, "I've got bad news, Frank . . . your sister's in the hospital." And Frank would look glum, rub his eyes, and say, "I have a *sister?*")

Famed playwright Chekov once said something to the effect that if you introduce a gun in Act I, it had better be used in Act III. (He said this right before shooting Sulu and Scotty.) Well, the opposite is also true, and is perhaps *more* true; if a gun gets used in Act III, it had better have been mentioned in Act I.

Now, what does this have to do with gaming?

Well, quite simply, elements should ideally be introduced before they become important to the plot . . . the sooner the better.

For example, let's take a theoretical space opera campaign. And let's say that the GM in such a game introduces a plot that begins, "Rumors abound that the good Queen Palala has succumbed to Star Madness, an illness that causes irrational behavior punctuated with paranoia and madness. She has gathered her fleet of spaceships and is bent on destroying her perceived enemies." If the players have never heard of Star Madness before now, they may well go, "Oh, c'mon . . . were you *that* desperate for a plot this week?" If they don't know who Queen Palala is, this problem becomes even *more* compounded. ("So let me get this straight; someone we've never heard of is suffering from something we've never heard of, and suddenly becomes the greatest threat to the galaxy?")

On the other hand, if the heroes are warned at the beginning of their careers about the dangers of Star Madness, and their second adventure they meet Queen Palala (who sends them on a mission, natch), and their fourth adventure they encounter someone with Star Madness, and their seventh adventure they hear rumors of something afoot in the Queen Palala's court, and *then* the adventure above is sprung on them . . . well, suddenly we've transformed plot cheese into powerful continuity.

Or, as another example, let's say you want to have a mystery in a fantasy game where a world-renowned bard is murdered, bringing the entire region up in arms over his death. Well, if the players (and characters) have never *heard* of this bard, making them actually care is that much more difficult. On the other hand, if they encountered him earlier (perhaps even sharing an adventure with him), and continue to hear about his exploits, then his death may well be affecting to all involved, making it that much easier to draw the adventurers into the story.

Now, this doesn't mean you need to bludgeon the players over the head with clues at every opportunity ("This week you hear rumors of yet more exploits of Gonnadio the Bard . . ."). But even a casual mention will give you the hooks and foreshadowing necessary to reel in the players in future adventures.

"But wait!" I hear you cry. "Does this mean I need to have my adventures plotted out ten sessions in advance? I can barely plot ten *minutes* in advance of my players!" Well, that's certainly one way to do it, and for some GMs it may be the best way. But perhaps the easiest technique is what we in the biz like to call "cheating."

See, one interesting thing about "clues" like these is that they can be everywhere, and they don't necessarily need to *mean* anything . . . at least, until the pieces fall together (or, more correctly, you put them together).

Think of it like Plot Scrabble. The GM may have a master list of useful elements that may come up in future games; once they're mentioned, and thus become part of continuity, they can be rearranged in any format he'd like.

So our GM may have mentioned:

- Chocobunnies (tiny bite-sized chocolate bunnies that have become wildly popular in the galaxy)
- Star Madness (illness that causes paranoia and irrational behavior)
- A "ghost ship" (rumored to cruise the space lanes with no crew aboard)
- A "Prophecy of the Triad" (rumored, once it comes true, to rebuild or destroy the universe)
- Queen Palala (good monarch, rumored to be looking to wed)
- Bleekco (Huge corporation with shady operations, CEO Thex Wizol)

Now, the trick is that the GM can throw out these elements to the players *without having any idea what they mean!* Having casually tossed out these breadcrumbs, the GM now has a ready set of elements to mix, match, and play "Scrabble" with --

- Bleekco plans to plant spores of Star Madness into Chocobunnies, crushing that product's market share and making way for Bleekco's own Cocohares
- The heroes investigate rumors that Bleekco has captured the ghost ship, and is suppressing elements aboard there that may relate to the "Prophecy of the Triad"
- Star Madness consumes Queen Palala, who uses her powers to attack her "enemies"

-- all of which look like they've been planned all along.

Now, the other interesting thing about foreshadowing in this way is that it becomes much easier to gauge player reactions. For example, if they express utter boredom whenever Bleekco is mentioned, it becomes possible to downplay their involvement without needing to reboot a game mid-session. On the other hand, if they seem keenly interested in the rumors of the ghost ship, then the adventure that incorporates it will probably be quite satisfying for them.

Foreshadowing is also useful to players. For example, if a player is working with the GM to establish a subplot where his character threatens to succumb to the Darque Syde, he may show hints of his inner rage by engaging in a berserk bar fight. Or if a hero wants to start a romantic subplot, then he may interpret something to be an omen of the love he shall soon find. (This works well for any game with culturally diverse populations . . . *anything* can be an omen: "Ah, look! The water runs *clockwise* over the mouth of my dead foe lying in this river. . . to my people, this is a sign of forthcoming passion, and low, low prices!")

Foreshadowing, then, is a great tool to make the game both more realistic and dramatically appropriate . . . and it's reasonably easy to fake.

And with it, when you shoot the characters in the third adventure, they remember seeing the gun in their first.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last time's answer: *Robin's Laws of Good Game Mastering*, p. 3.

And, since we got a fair number of questions asking what movie was I referring to [last week](#)wonk uoy woN
.neveS si slaog nwo sih rehtruf ot syug doog eht ot pu sklaw yug dab a erehw eivom eht

(*Three stars*) "**Pond Scum**: Simple organisms that carry out photosynthesis . . .or telemarketers, who *DO NOT* carry

out photosynthesis."

Windy City, Wayward Souls

by Sam Brown

Setting

On midnight, January 16th, 1920, the 18th Amendment took effect. In the name of decency and morality, Prohibition closed all saloons, smashed the distilleries, blockaded all roads to Faerie, shut down the schools of magic, and deported all demons attempting to ply their trade in this great nation. But . . . before the last bar was closed, the first speakeasies and blind pigs opened. Now, rumrunners and spell-smugglers keep an uninterrupted flow of booze and parchments coming over the border. In the streets, the gangs war with tommyguns and two-dollar hexes for control of the racket. Welcome to the Roaring Twenties.

The Underworld wants to make you an offer you can't refuse . . .

Arrival

Read or paraphrase the setting description above to your players as you hand out character sheets. The character sheets are listed below in order of importance to the storyline, so make certain that you use up the first characters if you have less than the maximum number of players. Have the players notify you when they're familiar with their characters. As each player does so, play through their character's arrival at the residence of Don Salvadre. The order of arrival is unimportant.

Tell each player that they have been called to the residence of Don Salvadre, a kingpin of the Chicago underworld with whom each of the characters have had positive dealings with before. Refer the players to their character backgrounds for details of their personal history with the Don.

Arrivals at the Don's residence are met at the door by Ace, the Don's right hand man. Ace waves each arrival in and shows them to the Don's study before returning to wait for the next arrival. Ace is friendly, and drops hints that he knows something about the boss' plan. He indicates that something big and exciting is in the works. Attempting to get more information out of him will only produce a large grin, and the excuse that the boss is looking forward to explaining it himself.

Don Salvadre sits, sunk into an overstuffed chair in a far corner of his large study. The gramophone beside him rasps out a recent LP by Fats Waller. In contrast to the upbeat piano music, the boss is still, seemingly lost in thought. He distractedly gestures each arrival inside, but hushes any attempt to speak before the whole group is assembled.

The Plan

Once the last member of the group has arrived in the room, Don Salvadre rises from his chair and pulls the needle from the record. He grows energetic as he rapidly strides across the room to close the door. With suppressed excitement, he motions the group to form around the large table at the center of his study, where he dashes off a rapid sketch on an oversized paper sheet. He speaks as he draws. "Yesterday night I get this call. It's a friend a' mine -- you don't need to know who -- an' he's got the most interesting news for me. Has to do with something he saw while hanging out near Boss Valtalvo's place up in Detroit. Seems Valtalvo got an armored car shipment. Now you know, and I know, and my nameless friend knows that Valtalvo doesn't just go around using armored cars for his rum-running, his spell-smuggling, or just about anything else. The idiot should start, as many shipments as he's losing to Bower's thugs. Eh, but I didn't get you all here to tell you how Boss Valtalvo should run 'is business. About this car.

"My little bird friend gets to wondering, and he makes a few calls and he follows a few hunches and guess what he

finds out? The car's straight off the New York docks, onto the road and there to Detroit. Fast as it set out, tongues are still waggin' when it goes, and this part is rumors, but they smell right to me. Word has it that the truck's got nothing but three guards inside, and three bags. The bags are money bags, only better.

"Most of you guys didn't hear it, but last month there was a big find. Some drunk Greenland fisherman blows off course. He runs aground on an ice floe, nearly goes down into the drink. Somehow the lucky fool manages to keep his boat floating. He lashes it to the floe, or some such. Whatever. Point is, before he gets his boat back into usable shape, he steps off onto the floe and goes for a look-see. There, on one side of the thing frozen into the ice, is a great old chest. The old salt takes a crowbar to it, pops it open, and spills half of what's inside into the sea."

At this point in the speech, alert PCs may make a listening check. They need to beat a success by 6 to hear the door behind them open as Mr. Smoke enters the room. He silently takes up a chair behind the group and listens along with them.

"What's left is a half chest full o' Atlantean coin. It's a fortune enough to keep a sultan's legion of demons and djinn in on your tab for your lifetime and yer grandkids lifetime. Well, enough for cheap demons. But enough to bend the ear of the Lightbringer himself, if you wanted to blow it all in one place.

"The story gets fuzzy here. Best I or anyone I know can tell, the loot ends up getting split three ways. One part gets taken back to Russia by gentleman one. The second part is snapped up by a representative from a British university that doesn't seem to actually exist. Boss Valtalvo happens to get a bid in on the last third, and it gets loaded on the next boat passing west to the States.

"So me and my friend, we're in agreement we know what's in this armored car. I settle down to thinking about how to get the crew we have in Detroit to getting their hands on it. This morning, before I've got my plan together, the phone rings again. The car is back on the road. It's headed this way.

"Now it doesn't take a lot of thinking, and my associate here concurs with me." At this point the Don points to Mr. Smoke. "Valtalvo doesn't have the scratch that he could'a paid for that stash all by himself. Word is he auctioned it, fair and square. So where'd the money come from?"

"Gotta be big Al.

"So Al goes in with Valtalvo on the auction, and splits the returns. What's in the truck is Al's share of the loot. It don't take a genius to figure out this will be the larger of the two parts."

At this point, the Don's sketched map is complete. It is a simple overhead illustration of a two-lane road, with the armored vehicle's path being obstructed by an overturned car in the road (which is marked "A"). An arrow points east at the edge of the map to "Alice's Barn." On the west edge of the map, northwest of the armored vehicle and the overturned car, is a representation of a wooden shack, marked "B."

"This is where you're going to catch Valtalvo's boys. Just northwest of Gary is Buffington lake. There's a farmhouse off the road, with nobody but a widow by the name of 'Alice' what lives there. She's got a phone, and she's friendly to the cause. After you leave here, you'll go stay with her for the day. Get some sleep."

"Valtalvo's worked things where the car should come into town before most

Mr. Smoke

Mr. Smoke appears as a precisely 6' tall Caucasian man in an impeccable black business suit, along with a black fedora and black sunglasses. His face is hairless, and emotions vanish from it as quickly as they appear. A faint aroma of brimstone clings to him.

Mr. Smoke is a major demon, not governed by the rules of the physical world. If a die roll is required for Mr. Smoke, assume he passes his roll by a margin of 6. If he suffers more than 15 points of cumulative damage, his body boils away into a cloud of sulphur smoke, leaving only his mangled clothes behind. Lesser damage has no effect on him.

Mr. Smoke is nearly entirely passive. His cost to act or even merely remain in this realm is no more comprehensible to mortals than the power available to him. Normally, he restricts himself to presence and conversation. Personally acting to influence events taxes him and shortens the time he can remain out of hell.

Theodore and Max have seen

folks are out of bed. You can expect to see it between three and five in the morning. Ace will be a couple miles up the road, watching for the car. You should get a call enough minutes ahead of time to get in position before the car gets to you."

the Don confer with Mr. Smoke before. He is a stranger to the other characters.

"That brings us to 'A' on the map. Molly, that's where you'll be, sitting on the side of a flipped over Chevrolet that I'm going to provide you with for the occasion. You boys are going to keep the car off the road until you get the call from Ace, when you drive it to block both lanes and roll it over. Having done that, everybody but Molly waits here in the shack with the big letter 'B' on it in my masterpiece."

"Molly you do your best to look all distraught as you sit on your car blocking the road. Wear that flimsy white dress. That should get the boys out of the car to help you on your way."

"From there, things are up to you. Get those moneybags whatever way it takes. It should be an easy job, but if you have to start shooting, go through with it. If the lead starts flying, I don't want any of Valtalvo's boys going home alive."

"On that note, here's a Christmas present for you. Has to do with 'Crusty' Malone who'll be overseeing the back of the car. Seems the last fight 'Crusty' showed up for, he didn't feel like he needed to take cover. One of Polaski's men unloaded a whole drum of his tommygun into 'Crusty' and not a shot hit. That's where this here Colt double barrel comes in. The shells are loaded with meteoric iron, custom packed this morning by yours truly. Whatever ward Crusty's wearing, whatever deal he's struck, this gun don't care."

Don Salvadre will hand the shotgun to Max, if he is in play. Otherwise, it is given to Theodore.

"That's all I got to say about the job. Bring back the whole stash of Atlantean loot and you'll each get \$4,000 for your trouble. Anybody got questions?"

If asked how they will recognize Crusty, Don Salvadre will explain that Crusty always wears a blue jacket, and it's always unbuttoned, even on such a winter night. (Any of the characters will recognize him regardless on a successful Streetwise roll.) If asked how they will flip over the car for the roadblock, the Don suggests that they drive it into place and push it over. If there are fewer than four PCs, the Don instead recommends they get some tools from the widow's farm to help them lever it over.

If asked how about the Atlantean coins, the Don will explain that they're valuable to all demons and some fey. They're carved out of basalt from the sea floor, looking much like ornate black stone poker chips. Coins in good condition may show white gold inlays. If anyone other than Yeggs asks for a share of the coins in their payment, the Don laughs them off, saying that they've got a dangerously foolish idea. Yeggs alone will be allowed to exchange his reward for coins at \$300 per coin, if he pushes for it. (If this persuasion is rolled for rather than roleplayed, vary the exchange rate by \$50 either way depending on the result of the roll.)

If asked for more money, the Don will be incredulous. The reward is indeed a generous sum, far more than is normally paid for even hit jobs. (Adjusting for inflation, this reward approaches \$40,000 per participant.) If successfully pressed, the Don may be persuaded to raise the price to \$5,000 each, but no more. Any attempt to talk the boss into a fatter reward is much less likely to succeed if done in front of the whole group (-3 to any rolls involved). Anyone who presses the Don overmuch for coins or more reward should realize that their quibbling is costing them favor in the Don's eyes.

Mr. Smoke only sits and listens. Close examination reveals occasional wisps of smoke coming from behind his glasses, where the corners of his eyes should be. These are most noticeable whenever anyone says anything that might anger himself or the Don. If questioned directly, Smoke states that the coins are very valuable. Each one might be worth as much as a life, in the right circumstances, although less than a soul. If asked about his connection with Don Salvadre, Smoke will state that he is the Don's liaison with another underworld organization.

The Heist

The group will be greeted at the waiting place by Alice. She wiles away the hours by preparing egg sandwiches and talking the characters into eating "just one more" to keep their strength up. Once the characters refuse to eat more, she brings down a cribbage set and demands someone play her. If everyone refuses, she puts the set back up and goes back to inflicting egg sandwiches on the characters. Overall the widow seems like an innocent woman who has no idea what she's involved in.

Eventually the hour rolls around to 3 AM. Ace calls the group to make certain that they're ready. Time passes. At 4:12 AM, the phone rings again. It's Ace, letting the group know that the armored car just passed him and should be their way in five minutes or less.

Getting the trap set up proves problematic, however. The coupe that the boss has left the group has trouble starting. A character needs to succeed at a Drive check to get it running. Failing by 5 or more floods the engine, preventing it from starting at all. This problem is easy to fix earlier in the day, if anyone thinks to check.

If they can't get the car started, 30 ST worth of characters may push the car into the gravel road. From there it takes 40 ST worth of characters to flip the car over. See the rules on p. B89 for rules on "Extra Effort." A character who fails his "Extra Effort" check still contributes his base strength to the team on a failed roll.

Characters using tools from the farm for leverage add 5 to their strength for purposes of flipping the car over. Anyone who didn't think to look for appropriate tools earlier should make an IQ check for a frantic search about the barn now! If failed, the character finds a fragile old tool that breaks on the first try, preventing him from contributing any strength to the attempt! If substituted for the Chevrolet, Max's Model T requires only 30 strength to flip. Theodore's Model A is just as hard to flip as the Chevrolet, and has a fresh coat of paint, besides.

Assuming the players have managed to overcome these difficulties and get out of sight (Molly aside), the roadblock works. The armored car pulls to a stop 10 yards away from the flipped coupe, and the driver gets out to examine. He will be outwardly friendly, in a strained and cautious way. (No modifier to reaction roll or persuasion skill checks.) A "Good" reaction or better will result in the driver calling his shotgun rider to get the crew out of the back of the car to help. So long as the reaction is no worse than "Poor," the driver will remain out long enough for a second attempt to persuade him. If the group's representative fails twice in a row, or scores worse than "Poor" on the first attempt, the driver returns to the armored car and attempts to drive around.

At this point, the group should spring the trap in whatever way they have decided. If two minutes pass from the car's arrival without violence, any alert character may make a sense check at -4 to notice a car drive up to the last bend in the road before turning into view and stop. Sight checks reveal headlights turning off. Hearing checks reveal the distant crunch of gravel. If no hostilities have broken out by the third minute, there's the sound of tommygun fire, and bullets whiz around the armored car and players. Roll 3d for everyone in the tightest cluster of people. On a 4 or less, that person is hit. Another sight or hearing check may be made at -4 to spot a man in the distance firing. On a critical success, the character recognizes the firer as Ace!

Once shooting starts, by the players or by Ace, the Valtalvo boys lose no time in drawing their guns and firing back. If the Valtalvo boys have somehow been disarmed already, they will attempt to wrestle the PCs guns away and fight back. Anyone inside the armored car can fire through slits on the walls, gaining -8 cover vs. being shot from the outside. Also, lighting is very poor. Unless the players left the engine and lights running on the Chevrolet, the only light source is the headlights of the armored car. Firing at targets outside this cone of light is at a -2 penalty. The inside of the armored car is lit by a lantern, removing any lighting penalty for firing into it.

There are a total number of Valtalvo boys equal to the number of PCs, counting the driver, shotgun passenger, and "Crusty" as the first 3. If there are five or more players, the 5th Valtalvo boy stays in the back of the armored car when the rest go to help. This one will be ready with weapon drawn while the others are outside.

This fight should go quickly, with the only real obstacles being Crusty, and the gangster in the truck, if present.

Once the fight ends, the PCs have several minutes to search the back of the armored car, investigate the firer in the woods, tend their wounds, and so on. The back of the armored car is empty aside from any corpses the players may have created there and two small moneybags. The moneybags are overstuffed with well-padded stone chits, fitting Don Salvadre's description of Atlantean coins. The coins detect as magical if Yeggs tests. If the PCs go to investigate the firer in the woods, they can find a Ford Model T without difficulty. An IQ role at -6 by anyone looking at the car will recognize the license plate as belonging to Ace. Otherwise the car looks identical to every other Model T ever made.

Ace himself will hide deeper in the woods if the group comes to investigate. He attempts to avoid detection (Stealth 12) but if caught, will pretend that he came to check on the group. He attempts to drag out the conversation until the police arrive, and then urges the PCs to flee with him in his Model T. Rather than running properly, however, he drives north as if attempting to dodge around the police roadblock, fails, and surrenders.

This fight is a good one to keep track of bleeding (p. B130) afterwards, as it adds not only to gritty realism, but also causes the group to be more ragged and desperate when the police arrive.

The Deal Goes Sour

No more than 10 minutes after the end of the fight, a group of seven police cars drive up and encircle the scene. PCs can see them coming 30 seconds before they arrive, or a full minute ahead if they pass a sense test.

The police leap from their cars at a distance. Two of the cars throw spotlights about, blinding anyone caught in the glare. The remainder of the police prop their rifles on the hoods of their cars and wait while the Chief shouts through a cone. The Chief gives the usual "you're surrounded, give yourself up" speech. If any of the players are overconfident and considering starting a firefight here, give them an IQ test (Common Sense or not). If they pass, point out that not only are they severely outnumbered, at a disadvantage by lighting, and facing opponents better set up to use long range weapons than them, that *if* the group should somehow manage to win, they'll be wanted for the murder of over a dozen policemen. One of the fallen Valtalvo boys crawls for a dropped gun only to be headshot by one of the police snipers. This should put to rest any doubts about how serious the police are.

Characters who have been keeping track of time will note that the police arrived very quickly. For a crime scene in the middle of the night out in the boonies of Gary, a seven car response in 10 minutes is unlikely to say the least. Characters not keeping track of time may still realize the same thing on a successful Streetwise test.

After putting down any resistance that breaks out, the police will round up, disarm, pat search, and throw in the back of their paddywagon all the living gangsters they can find. If Theodore is the first into the paddywagon, this will be good later. Dead gangsters will be left where they lay. Once all the live ones have been rounded up, the police will sweep the area with spotlights and German shepherds (Contest of skills: Stealth vs. Sense at 16 to remain hidden). Anyone caught in this round-up will be

William "Crusty" Malone

ST: 11; **DX:** 14; **IQ:** 11; **HT:** 13

Disadvantages: Overconfident, On the Edge, Ugly

Skills: Pistol (S&W M10)-16

Assume other relevant skills for Crusty are equal to his stats.

Crusty is demonically invested. In return for his immortal soul and other sundries, he has written off death by bullets. His Passive Defense versus ranged weapons begins at 20 and drops by 1 at the end of every turn that he *would* have been wounded if not for this protection. He may roll this Passive Defense even versus attacks that score a critical hit. True to Don Salvadre's word, his deal won't touch the magically inert meteoric iron fired from the Don's shotgun. Versus this, he defends as normal . . . which is to say not at all. Crusty is unaware of the fallibility of his protection, and will push it well past its limit if allowed.

Crusty is a spiteful wretch. If hurt but not put down, he will continue to fire as he clutches his wounds unbelievably.

Other Thugs

ST: 11; **DX:** 11; **IQ:** 11; **HT:** 11

Skills: Pistol (S&W M10)-12

The fifth thug, if present, has a Thompson SMG and the appropriate skill.

treated the same as the rest -- roughly.

The police seem to know what they're looking for, and won't rest until they've located the "evidence." They treat the gangsters without respect or fear of retribution. By "evidence," they mean the moneybags from the armored car. They won't discuss what it is they want with the bags. Actually, none other than the Chief know at all.

With everyone forced into the paddywagon, the police set off. Whoever was last into the paddywagon should roll a Sight check as the door is closing. Success notices that the police are boarding the armored car and driving it behind. Success by 2 or more spots Great War surplus anti-armor rifles in the hands of two policemen.

In the Paddywagon

The road is a bumpy one, and the crew inside the paddywagon jostle against each other with each bump. Light occasionally flashes through the wire reinforced windows above, and across the inside of the wagon. After a few such flashes of light, the rider furthest into the wagon (Theodore, ideally) notices that there's actually someone who's closer to the front wall of the wagon, who must have been in before. Play with the player's doubts. Maybe it's possible that he could have missed someone in the dimness? It seems odd.

With the next bump the character notices that his neighbor is wearing a starched white straightjacket, and is huddled facing into the corner of the wagon. The next light reveals this to be another misperception. The stranger is wearing a white suit. The next flash of light reveals the face of the stranger, a few inches from his neighbor's. He wears a toothy grin and pitch black sunglasses. "Hello," he says, "You can call me Mr. Chase."

Before anyone gets the chance to respond, the paddywagon squeals to a stop, throwing everyone inside forward. Seconds later, the door snaps open, and three armed policemen stand outside. They do a quick count of the occupants of the wagon. Mr. Chase is not present during this count. The door slams closed again.

An easy listen check will let anyone in the paddywagon hear the police outside discuss their operations. The Chief asks for the "evidence" to be locked up in the storeroom, and instructs the paddywagon driver to carry the prisoners on to the jail. The paddywagon rumbles back onto the road. In the darkness, Mr. Chase is again present and grinning. He says something like this:

"Bit of a rough spot you're in, I'd say. Ha. Ha. How'd you get yourself into this mess? Still figuring that part out? I'll spell it out for you.

"Most everybody in this van, yours truly aside, has done something or is something that would get them on Don Salvadre's 'no longer a good person to keep around' list. Someone here is a little too power-hungry. Someone else has a bad attitude and too much nitroglycerin. Someone else was just too close for the Don's comfort. The rest of you were actually good. Good, but expendable.

"So when it came time to gamble, when Mr. Salvadre saw a chance to snatch a good pile of cash in exchange for a few of his 'prize' underlings, look who he picked. That's right.

"You see, Mr. Salvadre knew you kids would probably win the fight that he was going to make sure happened. He also figured not all of you would walk away from it. More importantly, he knew where to put you so that when Don Polaski's bought-off cops were phoned, they'd be right around the corner to pick the survivors up. Didn't really matter if that was you or Valtalvo's boys. Either way the loot ends up in police custody. A tidy place for it to be, when the day shift chief just joined Salvadre's payroll yesterday. By the time Polaski comes to collect his prize, it'll be a couple of bags of hasty forgeries.

"Not a bad day's work for Mr. Salvadre, I'd say. Right now, all he has to do is count his loot, and practice the speech that gets his surviving chumps to be ready for the next suicide run. I imagine he'll make sure the next one is a more absolute lives-for-profit kind of deal. He can't have any patsies surviving long enough to put two and two together, can he?"

"So where does that leave you, my friends?"

"In a better place than you might expect.

"Yes. Did I mention that I consider you my friends?"

"In a few minutes, I'm going to do you all a favor. I hope you'll take the time to pay it back in the future. I see us having a long, profitable relationship together.

"Yes."

Mr. Chase remains long enough to answer one or two questions.

If asked he should be believed, Mr. Chase will only shrug and grin, showing more teeth.

If asked what he gets out of the arrangement, Mr. Chase will say, "Not much yet. It would be a fine thing to see Mr. Smoke's investment go away, however. Yes."

If asked who he is, Mr. Chase will respond, "I think you have a pretty good idea already."

After these one or two questions, Mr. Chase will touch his hat brim in a gesture of farewell. As the light flashes past, there's a shouted oath from the driver's seat. The paddywagon swerves violently, throwing everyone inside against one wall. It rocks to both sides, and then crashes to the right.

Characters inside are bruised, but can shake off their injuries. Light enters the paddywagon from the door, which is already half off its hinges from the crash.

Escaping prisoners will note that the driver is unconscious with a growing lump on the side of his head. The policeman in the passenger seat is blearily trying to force his way out of the damaged windshield, his door being pinned closed in the crash. It is an easy matter to subdue him.

Refuge

Stumbling from the wreckage, the group will recognize their surroundings as the northwestern outskirts of Gary. Call for a streetwise check by everyone conscious. Anyone who succeeds should be alerted that there's a speakeasy nearby that is tacitly aligned with Don Salvadre's interests. Anyone cautious about this should realize in the same Streetwise check that such a remote interest wouldn't be privy to the Don's every double-cross, if that is what has occurred. As such, they should still be welcome.

Stumbling to Pointy's Place, the group can mutter the password and be let in. (Either character with Gang Rank automatically knows this password. Anyone else needs to make a Streetwise check at -3) The group is quickly ushered to a private room in the back, where Pointy tends to them, having moonshine and bandages delivered in abundance.

Pointy will host the group for as long as they see fit. His sense of time doesn't seem to encompass how many days and nights pass inside the shuttered bar. Rarely able to tend to the PCs himself, he sees to it that one of his serving nymphs attends to them at all times. The nymphs are carefree creatures, unlikely to eavesdrop on the group's discussions. Unless the party does something to actively upset their serving nymph du jour, nothing that they say will be reported back to the politically savvy Pointy.

Any player who's been paying attention should realize that the group does have a limited amount of time to act. With the Atlantean riches, it shouldn't take long for Don Salvadre to buy enough protection to keep them out.

Taelaeon, a.k.a. "Pointy"

ST: 8; **DX:** 17; **IQ:** 11; **HT:** 13
Skills: Bartender-18;
Carousing-20; First Aid-12;
Streetwise-15

Pointy is one of the fey folk, living in exile. Tall and lean, he usually keeps the ears that

Payback

The possible approaches the PCs could take to payback are too numerous to address here. Given the high ranking members of Don Salvadre's gang inside the group, they should be able to choose from two or three places they know the Don to frequent for exacting their revenge. The Don is not entirely unprepared. He keeps no less than four thugs with him at all times so long as the group is unaccounted for. Don Salvadre knows that something is up, however, and that his days are numbered.

give him his name tucked into an oversized brown bowler hat. He's suspicious of the gangsters, and angered by their power-mongering. He's a flawless host nonetheless, and will aid the PCs unless they make him realize the schism between themselves and his tacit overlord, Don Salvadre.

When the group does go about exacting their vengeance on Salvadre, they find his last expressions to be relief followed by fear. Mr. Smoke watches, a flicker of disappointment crossing his face. He does nothing to change the outcome.

When the group returns with the unspent Atlantean coin, they find Mr. Chase waiting for them. With his ever-present toothy grin he asks them, "How can I help you spend your newfound riches?"

Aftermath

Don Salvadre's funeral is a grand affair. Everyone (including the PCs, by custom) is in attendance. Mr. Smoke and Mr. Chase both attend, with Mr. Smoke commenting that he will be "taking an extended trip" as the ceremony breaks up. Most eyes are on Theodore, however, and on the group around him. The city holds its breath, and wonders what, or who, will be next.

Rewards

Assuming they play their cards right, the group likely ends up with a small fortune in Atlantean wealth, the attention of Chicago's gang scene, and a demonic patron. If you want to continue the campaign, keep in mind that the characters will have to step very carefully to keep their bloodbath from turning into a feeding frenzy. The next few months should be devoted into their shoring up power structures and creating alliances just to hold onto what they now have.

Regarding XP rewards, the usual 1 for playing plus 1 for good roleplaying is to be observed. Further, give a bonus XP to anyone who finds a clever solution to the following problems: How to get the Chevrolet into position, how to deal with Crusty's protection, how to exact revenge on the Don. Figuring out what is going on before Mr. Chase spills the beans is also worth an extra XP for those involved.

Characters

Theodore Labatoni

ST: 12; **DX:** 13; **IQ:** 11; **HT:** 11

Advantages: Wealthy [20]; Gang Status: 3 (Underboss) [15]; Charisma: +1 [5]

Disadvantages: Ambitious* [-10]; Enemy: Valtalvo gang (Medium group, 9 or less) [-20]

Quirks: Dislikes jokes; Mild perfectionist; Pretends to like fine art; Rubs shrapnel scar when he thinks; Prominently wears a crucifix, even while dealing with demons.

Skills: Guns (.45 Cal Pistol)-14 [2]; Acting-14 [4]; Administration-13 [2]; Area Knowledge: Chicago-13 [1];

Diplomacy-11 [1]; Leadership-13 [2]; Merchant-14 [4]; Savior-Faire-14 [2]; Streetwise-15 [6]

Languages: Italian-12 [1]

*(Treat as Greed, but regarding Status instead of Wealth.)

Possessions: Good suit; C M1911 pistol; Cigar case & cigars; Ford Model A Sports Coupe

History: The golden boy of the Salvadre syndicate, you've been rising in rank and esteem in the gang faster than most can keep up with. Things are a bit stuffy at the top. While you had few problems getting here, your new peers seem to have little problem counting the bodies you stepped over to be among them.

Also, as an upper ranking Salvadre ganger, you know most everyone else in the gang. Have the other players explain what you would know about their characters based on this background.

Molly Elsbeth

ST: 9; **IQ:** 12; **DX:** 11; **HT:** 13

Advantages: Lucky [15]; Beautiful [15]; Alertness: +4 [20]; Magic Resistance: 5 [10]

Disadvantages: Alcoholic [-20]; Jealousy [-10]

Quirks: Chews gum; Likes tough guys; Incessantly checks her pocket-watch; Bitter regarding men; Passes herself off as stupid.

Skills: Sex Appeal-15 [6]; Acting-12 [2]; Gambling-11 [1]; Fast Talk-13 [4]; Stealth-11 [2]; Streetwise-11 [1]; Singing-14 [2]; Law-13 [6]; Guns: Derringer-13 [1]

Possessions: Grandfather's gold pocketwatch; .25 cal Derringer (cr, 2d-1dam, SS9, Acc1, 1/2D:75, Max:500, Wt:0.5 RoF:1 Shots:1 ST: 7); Rail pass

History: Law school was a drag, so you took to singing in the gentlemen's clubs and speakeasies for the extra cash and excitement it provided. It wasn't long before you noticed Don Salvadre eyeing you, and within weeks a torrid relationship developed. The affair bore fruit, and you found yourself dropped out of law school, off in the country where no one knew you, waiting to deliver the Don's child. When your daughter was stillborn, you returned to Chicago with your honor intact but your spirit dashed. Worse yet, the Don doesn't seem to notice you much anymore. The only time you feel peaceful is after your first few shots of the evening.

Tony "the Yeggs" Barrochi

ST: 10; **IQ:** 14; **DX:** 11; **HT:** 9

Advantages: Magical Affinity: +2 [25]; Extra Fatigue: 2 [6]; Unusual Background: Formal magical education [10]

Disadvantages: On the Edge [-15]; Chain Smoker [-5]

Quirks: Sore about being a med-school wash-up; Mild stutter when nervous; Bad memory for names; Likes frightening people; Occasionally impulsive.

Skills: First Aid-15 [2]; Diagnosis-12 [1]; Physician-13 [2]; Surgery-12 [2]; Chemistry-13 [2]; Demolition-20 [14]; Streetwise-14 [2]

Spells: Lend Strength-14 [1]; Lend Health-14 [1]; Recover Strength-14 [1]; Awaken-15 [2]; Detect Magic-14 [1]; Ignite Fire-14 [1]; Find Weakness-17 [6]; Weaken-14 [1]

Possessions: Zoot suit; Runed scarf; Whisky flask of nitroglycerin; S&W M10 pistol (default skill 7); Test tube holding large, insane Air Elemental (all stats 12); Rail pass

History: You would have been a member of the last graduating class from the Johns Hopkins prestigious Sorcerous Surgery branch. Things went terribly wrong in your last year, however. First an affair with one of the nurse succubi in the med school, and then a robbery left you a student with no way to pay for your final semester. You found work with the mob, brewing chloroform and nitroglycerin for their use. It was enough to get you through, but with all the distractions, however, at the end of the year your grades came back straight F's. Instead of a diploma you found yourself with an indefinite suspension. Since then, you've been working for Don Salvadre and his gang full time. It pays well, but some nights you wake up and feel like your life is already over.

Max Giacomi

ST: 15; **IQ:** 8; **DX:** 13; **HT:** 11/14

Advantages: Comfortable [10]; Gang Status 1 (Made man) [5]; Toughness 1 [10]; Extra HP +3 [15] **Disadvantages:** One Hand [-15]; Code of Honor: "Family" loyalty [-5]; Illiterate [-10]; Enemy: Valtalvo gang (medium gang; 6 or less) [-10]

Quirks: Strong, silent type; Forgets he lost his left hand; Likes to flaunt his height (6'5"); Likes to drive; Saying: "Ain't that the thing."

Skills: Guns: Thompson SMG-17 [16]; Boxing-12 [1] (1d+1 punching damage); Interrogation: 7 [1]; Shadowing: 7 [1]; Streetwise: 7 [1]

Possessions: Bad suit; Ithaca 10G sawed-off shotgun; Ford Model T Roadster; Thompson SMG in Roadster.

History: You were always the big kid, growing up. Your friend Ricci was always the smart one, and between the two of you no pocket of lunch money on the playground was safe. As the years went by, Ricci got woven more and more into the underworld scene, and you came with him. The two of you were a good team, and made a name for yourselves as small time hoodlums. Everything was going great until one day Ricci turned up face down in the road with most of his blood in a pothole three feet away. Don Salvadore took you in, helped you avenge Ricci's death, and gave you steady work. Losing your hand to an infected bullet wound last year ended your boxing career, but you know your job with the Salvadore syndicate is safe and secure. The boss takes good care of his men.

Luke "Handyman" Rioni

ST: 10; **IQ:** 12; **DX:** 15; **HT:** 11

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]

Disadvantages: Fat [-10]

Quirks: Never welshes on a debt; Likes showing off parlor tricks; Talks about "Little Lou" -- his miniature boxer puppy; Thinks spending big is impressive; Prefers bowties

Skills: Guns (.38 Cal Pistol)-17 [1]; Fast Draw (.38 Cal Pistol)-16 [1]; Holdout-12 [2]; Streetwise-11 [1]; Driving-14 [1]; Pickpocket-14 [2]; Lockpicking (Safecracking)-12 [1]; Running-8 [1/2]; Sleight of Hand-12 [1/2]

Possessions: Gray suit; S&W M10 pistol; Engraved silver toothpick case; Large gold rings; Assortment of trick coins; Rigged card deck; Rail pass

History: Your father was a preacher, and your mother kept the church clean and looked after the congregation. Your childhood was as sheltered as your family could make it, but in the modern Babylon that is Chicago, they didn't very well succeed. You couldn't help but notice how much better life was for the big men and the fancy ladies when compared with the poor but proud members of the church. When you reached your majority, you decided that poverty and pride were bad bedfellows, and moved out the same day, looking for wealth and fame. Honest business was too slow, so you made friends in the other kind. The longer Prohibition goes on, the more recruits the gangs need to meet demand for their services. Last week, you got an offer from Don Salvadore's syndicate and took it without a second thought.

Hector "Two-penny" Casey

ST: 11; **IQ:** 13; **DX:** 13; **HT:** 11

Advantages: Voice [10]; Attractive [5]

Disadvantages: Compulsive gambling: [-10]

Quirks: Compulsively shuffles a deck of cards; Overeager to prove himself (new to the gang); Ladies man; Afraid of dogs; Wears scented hand lotion

Skills: Sleight of Hand-14 [8]; Fast Talk-13 [2]; Gambling-13 [2]; Acting-13 [2]; Carousing-12 [4]; Guns (9mm Pistol)-15 [1]; Streetwise-12 [1]

Possessions: Wrinkled suit; MSR Luger 9mm Pistol; Four decks of cards; Dice, loaded and otherwise

History: You've been in love with the hustle and the con job since you can remember. It got you disowned from your

staunch farming family in upstate New York, but that was no great loss. You hopped the next train to the "Second City," Chicago, hustling all the way there. It wasn't long before you got your first "join or die" offer, and you lost no time picking the former. Now you're the newest recruit in Don Salvadre's gang, eager to turn a buck and earn some respect.

Late Victorian Law Enforcement

by Paul Cardwell

Many years ago, there was a TV series titled *Hec Ramsey* about an ex-gunman hired by a 1904 Oklahoma panhandle town as assistant police chief. Expecting a fast gun, they got a detective with all the cutting-edge investigative techniques of that period. Part of both name and biography were taken from Indian Territories Deputy US Marshal Heck Thomas. However, despite title-actor Richard Boone's objections, the network "suits" decided the public wasn't intelligent enough for a police procedural show and tried to make it just another shoot-em-up, and so it didn't last beyond two seasons. Then came *Quincy ME* and the current *CSI* to prove how wrong they were. The genre is quite adaptable to roleplaying games with the investment of a little research to play the detective properly.

One does not have to play a professional detective to play a detective character. Mystery literature, if not real life, is full of skilled amateurs from Brother Cadfael to Lord Peter Wimsey, Jane Marple, and J.B. Fletcher. Others are self-employed "consultants" like Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, or Nero Wolfe, as well as a few real-life counterparts, both quite different from the usual private eye, which is more legwork and dossier-compilation than deductive reasoning.

Since puzzles are an integral part of RPG, solving a crime is the ultimate of puzzle solutions. This could, like the previously named fictional detectives, fit any time period. This form of puzzle solving is not necessarily violent, as the shoot-em-up was not typical of any time period, fictional forms notwithstanding.

However, any mystery in a game should have some standard features. There is a distinct villain: the criminal, or perhaps even the "Mister Big" behind the henchman criminal first faced. There should be an abundance of red herrings provided by the GM. And most critical, the techniques should fit the time being played.

With Victorian RPGs -- such as *Cthulhu by Gaslight*, *Castle Falkenstein*, and even *Space: 1889* or the more historical western settings such as *GURPS Old West*, it would seem that some background material on the period might be useful to those playing those games. Obviously investigators of that era are not going to have the use of DNA, gas chromatography, or even blood typing, because these are all 20th-century discoveries. Since these techniques have become so common in the modern day, it is easy to assume that the police had no scientific weapons at their disposal in the 1890s. While conservatism of the period restricted their use, or at least their use as evidence in court, many techniques were at least available, if not in common use, at the time. After all, this was the time of the fictional Sherlock Holmes and his historical prototype, Dr. Alexander Melville Bell. Bell's powers of deduction, as famous at the time as his work on the physics of speech, were eclipsed by the mechanical inventions of his son, Alexander Graham Bell.

The Police

In most places of the period, the major technique of crime detection was for the officer to be a witness. Throughout most parts of cities, there would be a "constable on patrol" within a couple of blocks of any part of the city; One of several theories of the etymology of "cop" is that it was an acronym. Background noise was considerably less than today, so any commotion would be heard by the police. The cop involved would blow his whistle and head for the event. The police within hearing range would blow their whistles and move to assist, while those hearing the second whistles would move to cover the now-vacated blocks. Anyone fleeing the area of the first whistle would probably be caught in the constricting net of assisting police and questioned on the spot.

By 1850, there began to be a division of labor between the constables on patrol and the detective, with the patrolman more often preventing crime and chasing petty criminals, while increasingly trained detectives worked the cases without police witnesses, particularly the more serious crimes. In time, in the United States, the constable was a server of legal papers rather than a uniformed law officer. Indeed, at this time, only big cities had uniformed police at all. Smaller towns -- and definitely the frontier -- had only a metal badge to identify a law officer. The Texas Rangers still

have no official uniform, although the tan western outfit with boots and black tie is essentially one.

Even in the eastern US cities of the time, police were armed primarily with a truncheon. They may carry a revolver, but it would be discreetly in their coat pocket rather than openly in a holster. In the famous "Gunfight at C.S. Fly's Photographic Studio" (the OK Corral and Livery Stable was a half block behind, although an alley did lead to it from near the battleground), the Earps carried their pistols in their coat pockets, not in holsters, which were not low-slung and tied to the leg in any case . . . that is another 20th-century invention.

Except for isolated pockets, the US frontier was almost gone by this time, so in towns, they used the same patrol techniques as more populous areas, although a warning pistol shot more often served the same purpose as the whistle. British police would never carry firearms in those days, and despite Thatcher's Americanization policies, rarely do today, and then only for special assignments.

The police had the considerable advantage in that they were valued by the citizenry, and citizens would commonly risk their lives to assist an attacked officer. The horse opera posse was long gone by 1880, but citizens would occasionally give physical aid and generally provide information to any law officer needing it.

Investigation and Resolution

As with contemporary investigation techniques, most detective work consists of interviewing -- witnesses, leads, acquaintances of both victim and suspect, and so on. Even the descriptions given to other police and to the public were quite similar to those today, with a few changes such as a description of the horse rather than the getaway vehicle. If a suspect eluded the law in the immediate area, they would most likely use the train to go elsewhere. A knowledge of train schedules and even personal acquaintance with the conductors was most valuable in tracking outside the frontier itself.

The 1892 end of the Dalton gang in Coffeyville, Kansas, was a good example of this. The sheriff wasn't even armed when the gang held up both banks simultaneously. Condon's Bank cashier Charles M. Ball coolly explained to the robbers that the time lock wouldn't open the safe until 9:30 and it was only 9:20 -- despite the clock on the wall behind the Daltons showing 9:40. The First National Bank staff made several slow trips with the loot to delay things enough that the citizens emptied the hardware store of guns and ammunition. Shortly after, the Dalton gang no longer existed.

This cooperation was despite the fact that the police, then as now, tended to defend the rights of the propertied classes more than the laboring classes. In Europe, Asians and Africans were relatively rare, and there was too much chance that they were servants of some sufficiently powerful peer for the police to indulge in racist activities. Only within such ghettos as Limehouse London were the Chinese relatively outside the law's protection or control.

Unfortunately, in the United States -- particularly on the frontier -- racism was often a major factor. Only a couple of times in their history was the Texas Rangers more for law enforcement than genocide and strike-breaking. On the other hand, many of Judge Isaac Parker's deputy US marshals working the Indian Territories were black, like Bass Reeves or Zeke Miller, or Indian, like Sam Sixkiller or the tribal Lighthorse police. In that area, the primary technique was to interview witnesses and then track the suspect by the age and subtle-but-unique characteristics of hoofprints. Incredibly, tracking dogs were seldom used.

The deputy marshals worked in groups of four or five, on horseback, heavily armed. With them was a van, which served as both a mobile jail and supplies carrier, the driver (who was usually also the cook) unarmed to prevent attack by prisoners. Prisoners wore leg irons, but were otherwise free to help out in camping -- no work, no food. At night, all slept outside (unless weather prevented), the prisoners on a "trot line" chained to a tree, or if no trees were available, to the wagon wheel. The wagons were nicknamed "tumbleweed wagons" because they seemed to travel at random and were likely to appear almost anywhere.

The primary criminological technique of police in those days was interrogation. Because of the willingness of the public to "assist the police in their inquiries," and the likelihood that the inquiring officer was himself a witness, there was little recourse against physical threats or even torture by the police. That shameful period predominated later,

although some police did exist well outside official toleration in this period.

Most neighborhoods were also quite self-contained. Many people lived their entire lives without leaving an area of less than a square mile and a population of more than a very few thousand, including those who lived outside the neighborhood but visited it regularly. Thus identification would be easy in most crimes; the felon either would be well known to a fair number of witnesses or the residents would be suspicious of outsiders, and thus readily notice and remember them. Also eye-witness evidence would be far stronger than today, where it is generally unreliable. With literacy at the most elementary, and the lack of a barrage of images that we face today with billboards and TV, one depended more on memory and it was far less cluttered with irrelevancies.

In the time when the halftone printing process was still fairly new, most pictures circulated were police sketches, with woodcuts made for printing. These rogues galleries of known criminals would be small enough that the average policeman would recognize the subject on sight, from memory. In the United States, these were posted at the post office and the sheriff's office or police station where all citizens could see them and be warned. Texas Rangers had their Crime Book, which a company would carry with them in the field.

While bounty hunters still existed (as they do today), most police were prepared to travel across the country if necessary on the trail of a fugitive, despite the advantages of the telegraph. For example, John Wesley Hardin was captured by Texas police in Florida.

Identification

Before the widespread use of fingerprinting, the primary criminal identification system was Bertillonage. This was an 1880 system of measurements (length of the left foot with full body weight on it, length of right forearm, and so on) that would be unique to an individual. Alphonse Bertillon originally called the system "anthrometry" (human measuring, in Greek), but the eponym caught on better and was used throughout the world until a strange event in 1902 in a Nevada state prison.

A new prisoner, named Will West, was brought into the warden's office to be processed. The warden checked the Bertillonage card and demanded to know what kind of fraud the prisoner was perpetrating to get out of work detail, because he had been there eight months. However, *that* Will West was indeed on work detail at the time. The resident prisoner also was produced. In an incredible series of coincidences, the names and all the Bertillonage numbers were identical -- even the photographs appeared to be of the same person. Although unrelated, the two might as well have been twins! However, the fingerprints made the distinction. Upon hearing of this incident, the head of the Nevada prisons made the prophetic statement, "This is the end of Bertillonage." Bertillon had opposed fingerprints in favor of his own system, as it was simpler and did not require training, but after that, even he supported fingerprinting.

Fingerprinting was standard in Asia well before European colonization. Potters routinely "signed" their works with their thumbprint and the same technique was used with ink for documents. The first "European" uses of fingerprinting quite logically occurred in Asia first. Two independent uses became the basis for modern fingerprinting in 1870, which became a critical year.

William Herschell was a British government official in India. When a sepoy refused to sign his pension form, Herschell, in frustration, grabbed the man's hand, pushed it onto an ink pad and then on the document. He later said that he just wanted to get something of the individual on the document, but he recognized the uniqueness of the print.

In the same year, Henry Faulds, a British medical missionary in Japan, was studying fingerprints to see if there were racial differences (there weren't). A burglar had touched wet plaster, leaving a distinct handprint with the papillary ridges clearly showing. The police arrested a suspect and announced the case solved. Faulds asked for a hand print of the accused and showed there was no resemblance. The police reopened the case and soon produced a suspect that matched exactly. Faulds published a paper on this in the October 1880 issue of *Nature*. The first United States work on fingerprints was an article in the *American Journal of Microscopy*, July 1877, by Thomas Taylor of the Department of Agriculture.

in Argentina in 1891, Juan Vacetich developed the classification system still used in the Spanish-speaking world. In 1892, Francis Galton published *Finger Prints*, a textbook on the subject, showing how they were distinct. In 1897, Sir Edward Richard Henry developed the classification system still used, with some refinement, in the English-speaking world. Until the recent computer-readable techniques, these were the two main classification systems.

While the early fingerprints were worked from visible prints (blood and paint naturally were more frequent than almost-dry plaster), even in Fauld's time the invisible "latent" prints were being "developed" by dusting with finely powdered metal or carbon black. Heated iodine was used to develop those on more porous surfaces, but they would fade and so had to be photographed rather than lifted by a collodion film (cellophane tape came much later).

A 3% aqueous solution of silver nitrate, sprayed on the print, could be "developed" under ultraviolet light. Lacking an artificial ultraviolet, direct sunlight was generally used for the light source, even if mirrors had to be employed to convey the sunlight down a darkened hall to illuminate the print. (This is why the cartoon detectives in the introduction to the PBS *Mystery* series have that large mirror.)

In spite of this extensive early knowledge of fingerprints, they were little used in the nineteenth century. Because of Fauld's work, Japan was the first to use them routinely in criminal detection, often with Fauld himself doing the analysis. They were first used in the United Kingdom to solve a crime in 1901. The first use in the United States was by James McLaughlin in 1905 on the Rosebud reservation in South Dakota. It wasn't until a 1912 St. Louis case that they were admitted into evidence in a trial, although they were widely used in investigation by then.

Other Evidence and Techniques

The systematic study of handwriting to detect forgery goes back to the 1600s, so that would definitely be a possible detection method for the 1880-1900 period. The magnifying glass was an early tool of all detectives. Indeed most of the present day techniques of handwriting analysis, such as microscopic examination, letter shape, ink examination, and so on, would have been in use then. Only analysis of the chemical composition of the ink or the fluorescence of ink under ultraviolet light are modern tools of the trade.

Alfred Swaine Taylor in Britain in 1843 first detected semen in a rape case, simply by using a microscope to observe the sperm. This technique for gaining evidence would be routine by the turn of the century. Uhlerihuth (no first name found) had a chemical test that would differentiate between human and animal blood stains in 1901. The current A-B-AB-O system of blood typing was discovered in the same year by Karl Landsteiner, for which he would later receive the Nobel Prize. The Rh factor was not discovered until 1937.

Qualitative analysis -- the ability to detect materials in a suspect chemical -- dates from 1842, and quantitative analysis -- the ability to determine percentages of these materials -- from 1847. However, the ability to determine this from a residue, rather than a bottle of the stuff, evolved over the years, not really reaching an acceptable level of accuracy until the development of gas chromatography in 1952.

A famous turn-of-the-century case alleging murder by arsenic poisoning fell apart on the issue of laboratory contamination . . . an issue that has not totally been resolved even today.

Poisons were almost as popular as firearms in this period -- especially in Britain with its firearms restrictions, but also in the more settled areas of the United States. The two most common poisons of the day, arsenic and strychnine, leave definite physiological signs on the body of the victim. Arsenic produces vomiting and diarrhea if in massive doses for a quick death, and produces baldness, rough skin, and white ridges on the nails if used in small doses over time. The clues are garlic breath and a chemical test for the metal in a urine sample. Arsenic poisoning could be confused with cholera, which was often epidemic in that time, so the chemical analysis was definitely useful.

Strychnine produces an agonizing death typified by a constriction of the longissimus dorsii muscles of the back. The arched back is clue enough. Aside from mushrooms ("Why doesn't the culprit eat any?"), most other poisons (spider or snake bites, carbon monoxide, and the like) would likely be accidents rather than murder, but make great red herrings, and might just possibly be a murder weapon, although statistically unlikely.

The "recreational" drug of the day, opium, was either smoked or ingested in alcohol (laudanum was still being used as an anesthetic or at least analgesic, even though nitrous oxide, chloroform, and ether were all available and far more used for the anesthetic). While often abused to the point of insensibility, the opium use of that day would rarely be fatal -- at least not directly. Cocaine was just coming into use and would be found primarily in patent medicines, which had their own addicts. These were finally removed by the additions to the Pure Food and Drug Act in the early 20th century.

By far the most important figure in this pioneering period was Alexandre Lacassagne of the University of Lyon medical school. In his *Précis de Médecine* in 1878, he gave the details on determining the time of death (rigor, lividity, temperature, and so on). In 1889, he discovered the distinctive rifling marks on bullets that would enable one to determine the specific firearm that fired the significant bullet. Based on Dr. Lacassagne's work, Edmond Jocard, in 1910, established the first police crime lab in Lyon. Lacassagne was so much in the forefront of this field that one can almost insist that any Victorian PC endeavoring to perform these techniques should also be required not only to have literacy in French but also be in correspondence with the doctor.

Time of Death

Just to be accurate rather than misleading in the clues given the players, time of death could be determined by several means at this time -- Lacassagne didn't invent them, just put them in an orderly and more accurate form.

- **Temperature:** If not frozen (icehouses in the Victorian era or weather in any period), normal body (temperature 98.6 F) minus the rectal corpse temperature) divided by 1.5 gives the number of hours since death.
- **Rigor:** Stiffening starts four to 10 hours after death, starting with head and neck (particularly jaws and eyelids) and relaxes again in three to four days.
- **Lividity:** The body is splotchy where blood drains and accumulates, unless in contact with the floor, chair, and so on, which shows no markings. The process stops and becomes permanent after 10-12 hours. This is also a good indication of a body having been moved recently after death, as there are conflicting areas of pooling.
- **Putrefaction:** This starts 24-48 hours (this starts sooner the warmer the air or water temperature), due to bacteria. Increasingly, the body turns slightly green, bloats, and smells. Extreme cold temperatures will delay the perception of this beyond 48 hours.

(Fans of the *CSI* television show may be surprised to learn that, indeed, fly and beetle infestation is an excellent determinant, often giving accuracy to an hour, but few if any knew about it at this time.)

In all these techniques, there would logically be a time difference between the first publication of these methods and their widespread use; the delay in the widespread use of fingerprinting is an obvious example, although this trend continues to the modern day (Watson and Crick won the Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology in 1962, yet DNA analysis wasn't perfected for evidence until the early 1990s). However, if one subscribed to the right publications (and could read a few languages -- at least English, French, and German), the use could be close to the publication -- assuming the in-department politics permitted such cutting-edge methods to be used.

Character and Adventure Creation

Never make a character either completely progressive or mossback. This was a period of rather mixed progress, even within one individual. Major General Robert S.S. Baden-Powell was quite progressive in his contention that all soldiers should be able to conduct reconnaissance; thus his book on the subject, *Elements of Scouting*, became so popular outside the military that it produced the more familiar *Scouting for Boys* and the rest is history. Yet on most matters, both military and civil, he was rather reactionary and was declared a hero in the Boer War although his sizeable force was pinned down at Mafeking by a few farmers.

Even a reasonably "modern" type like W.S. Gilbert protested modern major generals and the radical new practice of treating Royal Navy sailors as human beings, although he did acknowledge that class distinctions were strictly an

accident of birth rather than anything else. (See *HMS Pinafore* and *Pirates of Penzance*.)

For GMs looking for story ideas, any mystery, written or televised, can provide an abundance of plots. Particularly mine the lode of TV mysteries in syndication on cable, as those who saw them the first time around will likely have forgotten them years later. Even present day settings can be twisted by putting them into another period, as long as one is careful to exclude any anachronism in the story. Make sure the technology of the period will permit solving them, but since most of these depend on deduction from clues rather than forensics, this is often surprisingly easy. Even anachronisms can be cured by substituting something similar from that time.

The use of these techniques is not limited to formal "mystery" settings or scenarios. There is always the possibility that the investigators may serendipitously come upon a situation requiring these skills. After all, even today there is often the "reward for information leading to the capture and conviction . . .", and they were even more common in this period.

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- There are also published reprints of Sears and Wards catalogs from this period which are excellent for mass-marketed items and their prices.

The Quest for the Masters

by William J. Keith

The Crust

This adventure (or adventure series) is designed around the quest for mysterious and powerful knowledge. Though inspired by the *GURPS* advantage "Trained by a Master," the quest is presented largely free of any particular statistics and can be used for character who seek any such knowledge. The GM will need to provide a source of the hidden lore being sought, equipped with NPC teacher(s) and a repository well-secured by secrecy, tough defenses, powerful connections, or any campaign-suitable means. Though options are provided for having only one or a few characters truly training, it is preferable that the entire group is seeking the rare knowledge that the hidden teachers provide; certainly all seekers must have the appropriate prerequisites for acceptance to the Masters' training; and the group will need several years to spend in study, away from most of the campaign world's storyline (unless it follows them there).

The Sauce

It's common for seekers of hidden knowledge to undertake arduous quests into the wilderness, seeking the ancient places that keep esoteric skills tucked away from unworthy eyes. The *GURPS* "Trained by a Master" advantage requires that a player attempting to gain this valuable trait disappear from play for two to seven years while undertaking this study. At the end of the seeker's pupilage, he emerges with a certain cachet among practitioners of his art, typically with a newfound sense of the harmony and balance of the universe and the ability to cause grievous bodily injury to his foes without breaking a sweat.

Retreat from the world is said to aid in the spiritual understanding that such teaching often comes with, and preservers of hidden knowledge find that isolation makes their job a lot easier. That doesn't mean that a keeper of the secrets can't be found in the heart of Brooklyn -- it's just difficult to preserve your secrecy when the landlord has a key. Besides, there's a certain atmosphere to a mud hut in the middle of the Kalahari that's lacking in a cold-water walkup, ascetic as the latter may be. But all this doesn't mean the character has to disappear from the adventure. Have the adventure follow the character!

This won't be suitable for all campaigns, especially ones where a powerful enemy can make a move at any time. Sometimes, though, a player decides that his character needs something special to move to the next level. Sometimes this rare knowledge is vital for game-related missions, and the time must be invested. If the world can spare the PCs for a few years (perhaps we're in between global threats right now, or some allies can hold the fort while the heroes upgrade; this might be RP'ed later in a "meanwhile, back at the ranch" style), follow the quest for hidden knowledge as a worthy adventure in itself. Even the characters that don't seek this knowledge can be entertainingly employed at an exotic retreat or a nexus of arcane wisdom while their more studious mates are plumbing the depths of nature.

The Ooey, Goey Goodness (Plain Cheese)

For those who do seek the Masters' knowledge, here are some components of the quest that can be expanded or left out, as desired, to form the basic framework of the Quest adventure.

Finding the Master

To get the hidden lore, first you have to *find* the hidden lore. The possessors of this kind of knowledge usually have a good reason for keeping it secret, and they're not going to want their knowledge spread around. A character searching for a particular tradition, or a fabled skill, will have to dig through the GM's pick of sources and obstacles -- arcane tomes, shady characters, and possibly misleading clues or impostors -- before finally locating true directions to the real

thing. Once that's found, often he will have to undertake a trek to a remote part of the campaign world -- though for a cyberpunk setting, "remote" could mean the Beaverhead Mountains of Montana, where the genius behind NetSpace has retired in peaceful disconnection. Along the way, obstacles may be set in the quester's path; his enemies could be trying to keep him from the information, or the Masters may have forewarning of his coming and seek to test his resolve.

Acceptance as a Pupil

So you've found the secret lair of the Keepers of the Ancient Scrolls. Time to buckle down and get to studying? Hold on. Just because you've made it this far doesn't mean you'll be accepted. First, you need to prove your worth. The more dangerous the information, or the more valuable it is to its holders, the harder it will be to gain access. The test may be in the form of trial by combat, philosophical debate, or a simple interview with the wisest among the Masters; or it may come as a subtle choice presented casually to the stranger, to see if his motives are sufficiently pure. Failure means being turned away, or offered only more basic training (which may still be of high quality, though not of the level sought). Rejection can be permanent, or the Masters may propose a secondary quest wherein the seeker may purify himself, hone his skills, and prove himself worthy. Acceptance means that the character begins his training.

At this stage, the party may split into two groups -- those taking the higher-level training, and those who are only accompanying their friends or who failed an acceptance test and cannot or will not try again. The rest of this section will focus on those taking the training -- for tips on how to keep any other players engaged, see "Toppings" below.

The Studies

Those taking the training are now accepted members of the community, with a definite place: students. For those developing the "Trained by a Master" advantage in *GURPS*, the character immediately gains any Disadvantages imposed by this Background: If an Enemy, that enemy will gladly oppose a student of their own foes; if a Code of Honor, it may take some time to internalize, but until then the student faces expulsion and societal disgrace by breaking faith; and so forth. The student also gains the school as a 20-point Patron (an unusually skilled entity that provides rare abilities). As training progresses, the point value of the Patron diminishes as the student becomes better able to handle his skills. The points being taken from the Patron are those used to develop the skills that the Advantage provides access to. Other experience points gained during this adventure can be used to purchase the associated Theology or Philosophy skills, but when the final points are transferred from the Patron to the core skills, the student's foundational education is finished.

Studies often consist of several components. Chief among them will be the core skills sought by the player. The largest amount of time during the day will be devoted to learning about these rare skills and undergoing the strict discipline of practice and study required to achieve them. The GM will be fully justified in making this learning very slow, pacing the expenditure of points to fill out the full two to seven years the campaign has set for the study; if these were easy skills you could learn in a class down the street, you wouldn't have needed to journey all this way. There should be some off-duty time -- besides allowing the student to become acclimated to the environment, the off-duty time allows side adventures to be played, if desired.

Another component of training is frequently philosophical or religious study. The Masters will want to see to it that their valuable teachings are used properly. A certain level of devotion to the appropriate school of thought may be insisted upon before higher techniques are taught to the student.

Finally, though, the work pays off. As the player and the GM evolve the character's course of study, the character develops new skills -- which can be a celebrated triumph -- and improves the ones he has. This adventure can be used to advance earlier, basic skills as well, representing further study in the "fundamentals" as the character progresses.

Graduation

Eventually, the character will have completed his studies. The school is nearly ready to release him on his own

recognizance, armed with the tools they have provided and guided by the tenets of their philosophy. Legend often has it, though, that the teacher provides one final test, ranging from a weeklong fast in search of a vision to a harrowing life-or-death test against incredible odds. Assuming the student survives and otherwise successfully completes the test, he is a free man once again. Though a diploma is seldom given, some other sign -- a tattoo, a pendant, a secret gesture -- will probably mark his or her initiation into the ranks of the educated.

At this point, if in *GURPS*, the character should have enough points to purchase the "Trained by a Master" advantage. Either he came in with sufficient points, or he obtained enough adventuring here to make up the difference. ("But wait!" you may say. "What if he runs off before the final test?" Good question. See "Toppings: The Runaway," below.) The training is finished -- the character can return to the campaign world, prepared to smack bad guys around in the name of serene justice.

Toppings

Lesser Mortals

Those not taking the training in the esoteric skills known by the Masters can still find the hidden keep to be a valuable experience. If the entire training will be over in a session or two, the other PCs may simply hone their current skills, pick up some new tricks, and learn something about the old ways. If allowed, they might help their comrade with one or more of his tests -- perhaps suitably modified by the Masters to test the candidates well, while teaching something to their friends. They may also take part in the other Toppings listed here.

The Secret Seal

Why is the hidden knowledge so dangerous? Is there an evil opposite to the teachings of the school? Are there even deeper mysteries the Masters are loath to plumb? What's behind the door in the third basement that says "Do Not Open" in every known language, and what will happen now that poor Wu the orphan kid has opened it?

It's demon-hunting time -- or perhaps an ancient sorcerer has been released from his captivity, or the Gateway to the Abyss of Greed has been opened, or a deadly disease unleashed on the locals. (It's always something.) Some ancient and dangerous secret that the Masters were guarding has gotten loose. All of their resources are going to go into fixing this problem, and that includes the newly skilled students (and any mundane friends of theirs that may be hanging around). Of course, the PCs will turn out to be in the path of the central threat; or maybe the Masters will handle that, while the PCs have their hands full saving the innocents from being bystander casualties as the Masters battle the Evil Thing with eye-poppingly cinematic stunts (sorry, that's in the graduate course -- if you have another couple of decades to spend at it).

The Worm in the Apple

All is not pristine in the hidden keep. As the students undergo their training and the somewhat-more-mundanes knock about, hints of dissension appear among the Masters. Is there a traitor in their midst, or an honest difference of philosophy? Is there going to be a schism? Should the PCs try to stop it, or should they refrain from meddling? If the school does split, the students face a critical decision -- which Masters do they follow? Follow the wrong teacher, and you may find yourself expelled from Paradise.

The Runaway

Training is not truly complete until the final test is passed. However, a student must learn his skills before this test. This leaves open the possibility of someone, half-trained (or worse, fully trained) running off before the final seal of approval is placed on their studies. If it's another student, the PCs may be sent to fetch him, having to face some of the school's techniques, albeit at a low level. If the former student abandoned the school after being almost completely trained, the school may face an apostate who is willing to pervert their teachings. Perhaps the runaway lacks the final

component of his training, though -- the final test is itself a lesson, and this lesson is the only key to beating him. The Masters have their duties here -- you, candidate, must complete your training and go to face this corrupt apprentice. You are now a guardian of the secret knowledge: do not fail your duty by letting the truant escape.

Pyramid Review

Virus Alert! Card Game

Published by [ZenoGames LLC](#)



Game Design by **Bill Stackpole**

Illustrated by **Dorothy Hogan**

100 full color cards; \$14.95

ZenoGames LLC has started up operations on what they hope will be a series of family games, and *Virus Alert!* is one of the first pair of offerings. It's a card game that puts you in the role of a computer hacker looking to cause a little connected mayhem.

The object of the game is to be the first player with 10 uninfected Objects on the table. Objects are the various computer programs, documents, and web sites under your control. Players must balance getting their Objects out while tossing viruses onto their opponents' cards.

Each player starts with five cards, and he cannot have more than five when his turn ends. He starts by drawing a card, then playing a card if he wishes. If he doesn't want to play one, or he can't, he discards any excess and play passes to the left. Since you're only allowed one play per turn, you have to choose between placing one of the critical 10 Object cards in front of you or sabotaging other players when they do the same.

When Object cards are down, Action cards will have something to tamper with. The most basic play is to hit someone (or more likely, several someones) with a Virus. The game comes with 25 plastic green tokens that represent viruses. When you play the card, you roll a six-sided die (also included) and place that many tokens on the Object cards of your choice. If there aren't many Objects out (which is probably the case early in the game), you may have to double up on tokens on some cards. While an Object card isn't worth any less just because it has multiple tokens on it, it's that much harder for the owner to clean out all the viruses.

Those are the basics; the rest of the cards jiggle things around a bit. Anti-Virus, once played, will absorb new viruses played against you, and will allow you to siphon one virus per turn from one of your Object cards. Once it has six tokens, it stops working and gets discarded. A Virus Generator works in reverse: It starts with six tokens and can dispense them one at a time on each of your turns. Scan can take out your Virus Generator, and AV Killer can remove your Anti-Virus card. Cards can also retrieve discarded cards, duplicate cards in play, or remove viruses in different ways, among other effects.

While Object cards all serve the same function and count the same for victory conditions, they aren't entirely interchangeable. Varieties include Web Pages, Games, Graphics, E-Mail, Documents, and Software. Recycle allows your opponent to remove 1d6 cards of a certain type, so putting out all Game cards makes you a prime target. Then again, someone else may have more Game cards than you and be closer to 10 Objects, or all yours may have tokens on them, or the user may roll too low on the die to affect you and your opponents . . .

The game has a few of the hiccups you might expect from a startup game company. The packaging isn't the highest quality, for one. The box is thin cardboard and could easily get mashed in a backpack, the bottom feels even thinner than the top, and the advertising blurb on the bottom is just a piece of paper loosely attached with glue. The cards inside are better, and while the artwork and graphic design is blocky and shows little in the way of imagination, it's clear, legible, and on fairly sturdy stock. Still, with such bold graphics they could have given some of that space over

to putting card instructions on the cards themselves -- as it is, you have to refer to the rules until you've learned what does what. Not hard to do, really, but for a family game that will probably involve the youngsters it's an inconvenience.

They might have saved gamers a few precious pennies had they just stuck with the 100-card deck and foregone the six-sider and the tokens (buyers could have used the pennies they saved to use in place of the little plastic tokens).

Play is rather poor with just two people -- there's not much strategy about who's going to suffer your wrath -- but as target . . . eh, players are added to the mix, the action gets a little more frantic (the game can take up to six, though you may want to lower the number of Objects needed to win). It's a simple, straightforward design, plenty kid-friendly, and though there's not much innovation over the average entry, ***Virus Alert!*** is a fast learn, a fast play, it has surprising replay value, and it absorbs the players easily.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

State of the Art: 2063 (for Shadowrun)



Published by [FanPro](#)

Written by Rob Boyle, Elissa Carey, Drew Curtis, Eleanor Holmes, Jamie Houston, Robyn King-Nitschke, Michelle Lyons, Peter Millholland, Jon Szeto

Art by John Bridgegroom, Marko Djurdjevic, Steve Prescott, Marc Sasso, Klaus Schwerinski, Jason Vargas

208 B&W softcover; \$19.99

Most *Shadowrun* supplements tend to revolve around a certain theme, like magic, cyberware, megacorps, and so on. *State of the Art: 2063* is different; instead of having a single, unifying topic, it is presented as a quick overview over the hottest topics in the World of 2063.

As it is the norm for all Shadowrun supplement except for the "core books" (such as *Magic in the Shadows* or *Man and Machine*), each chapter is presented as a file posted to the Shadowland Data Haven, with various attached comments by the shadowrunner community. Since there is no way of knowing which, if any, of these comments are ultimately "true" in the game world, the GM can pick and choose which are true, and which are only unfounded rumors or corporate disinformation. Any relevant game rule information can be found at the end of each chapter.

The first chapter deals with genetic engineering, and its applications as of 2063. There is enough discussion of the basics of these technology, the megacorps involved, and the specific difficulties and possibilities involved with genetically engineering awakened species to allow GMs to create shadowruns revolving around these issues. Runners can also use genetic therapy to rewrite their DNA. Useful applications include adaptation to hotter and colder climates, age rejuvenation, and throwing off forensic examination and ritual magic. It uses game mechanics similar to bioware, and none of it looks terribly unbalancing. GMs should beware, however -- it says in the rules section that these techniques are 25% cheaper when done before birth, and if the GM doesn't put his foot down, he might find himself with street samurais who were all "test subjects" as children . . .

The next section brings us seven new metamagical techniques, from Sympathetic Magic (using ritual magic on your enemies without any blood samples), to Psychometry (gaining strong psychic impressions and even visions from emotionally charged objects) to the fine arts of Geomancy (imprinting magically charged sites so that their magic works in your favor). Especially interesting is Filtering, a technique that allows mages to work their magic even in locales with a very high background count (*Earthdawn* fans might find this concept familiar . . .). Many may consider anything that allows mages to work in space to be good, though casting spells outside a populated space station is still next-to-impossible even with this technique. Rounding this section off is a short description of formal duels between mages, and game rules for them. Especially nasty are the so-called "scorching" duels, which might weaken the magical abilities of the loser . . .

Coming up after that is a chapter on the life of mercenaries, which will be especially useful to those of us who have missed out on the old *Fields of Fire* supplement. Described are the standard modus operandi of mercenary companies, the current hot spots around the world, the favorite "ports of call" of this profession, and the tools of the trade. Game stats are given for everything from basic survival equipment to field artillery.

The fourth chapter is a short chapter on security systems: what security systems are in use, how smart companies will set up their security perimeters, and how runners can get entry despite all those measures. This is an incredibly useful chapter, since most shadowrunners will do some breaking and entering now and then. In fact, GMs of other modern and near-future campaigns might consider buying *State of the Art: 2063* for this chapter alone if they have to deal with security issues at all! All those scanners, cameras, pressure plates, and overlaying fields of fire will make the 'runners sweat if they have to gain entry somewhere they shouldn't . . .

The final entry deals with modern culture and trends in 2063. There are short descriptions of the latest songs, most popular movies, hottest clubs, major sports leagues, and trendiest vacation jobs in both North America and elsewhere. The application of this to shadowrunning isn't as immediately apparent as with the other chapters, but smart GMs can use this to stage runs involving the glamorous stars of the Sixth World -- or just invoke a few pop culture references for in-game flavor.

So is this book worth the money for a Shadowrun GM? Yes, as long as some of the above-mentioned topics are of any interest to you. However, there is a fear that this book might become a "must-buy" if future *Shadowrun* supplements frequently refer to it -- which is especially likely with the section on new metamagics. Although it is a good book, it would still be considerate if the developers were to avoid this.

--*Jürgen Hubert*

Pyramid Review

The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Game Core Book



Published by [Decipher, Inc.](#)

Written by Steven S. Long, John Rateliff, Christian Moore
& Matt Forbeck

Illustrated by Kieran Yanner

304-page full-color hardback; \$39.95

Among all the new games based upon licenses released in 2002, there are three that stand out from the pack. The first of these is *Buffy the Vampire Roleplaying Game*, arguably the hottest and coolest of the three and has the advantage of being something all new. The other two we have seen in one form or another, but now one company has the license for both -- Decipher, Inc. To date, the company has released both a [Player's Guide](#) and a [Narrator's Guide](#) for their *Star Trek RPG*. Yet, for their *Lord of the Rings* license, we have only seen a cut-down introduction to the full RPG in the boxed [The Lord of the Rings Adventure Game](#).

The *Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Game Core Book* comes as a sturdy dark green-brown hardback prominently displaying the "One Ring" on Sauron's finger on its cover. After this imposing start, the inside is beautifully illustrated with stills taken from the film version of *The Fellowship of the Ring* worked into the layout to very good effect. While there are some who may have disliked the film, there is no denying the appeal of its visual design and this is lent heavily to this book, working to give it a strong sense of Tolkien's Middle Earth -- which helps the prospective gamer prepare for play. In addition, quotes from the trilogy of novels are used at the top of various sections. What little original art there is, is used to depict the six sample characters in the same manner as in the *Star Trek Roleplaying Game Player's Guide*. Kieran Yanner's illustrations are less drawn and scrawny here, with both the Dwarf and Hobbit characters actually possessing something of a stocky build.

After the introduction, the game gets down to explaining the setting of Middle Earth, which is helped out by the pleasing map in both the fronts and ends pieces. The background seems solid and useful, but more so for players wanting to get a feel for their character's homeland. The GM will doubtless want more information than is given here.

As with the *Star Trek Roleplaying Game Player's Guide*, there is no one clear and easy-to-find step-by-step list of how to create a character for The Lord of the Rings RPG. However, the process is explained throughout the section on "Creating a Hero," and this is relatively easy to find. Where the *Star Trek Roleplaying Game Player's Guide* seemed to present its rules for creating characters in a scattershot fashion and failed to give an example of the process from start to finish, neither of these shortcomings are repeated in *The Lord of the Rings RPG*. The information needed is laid out in an orderly fashion, so that you can go from one section to the next following the rules to get the character that you want. Although the two examples of character generation are handled in a succinct manner and spread over several sections, they are nevertheless useful and should ease those new to the process through to creating their first native of Middle Earth.

Players may either roll 2d6 nine times and choose the best results for the six attributes or take a standard set of six numbers and modify them with extra points. The six attributes are Bearing (the equivalent to charisma and force of personality), Nimbleness, Perception, Strength, Vitality, and Wits, which can be modified a player's choice of race. These are the basic four of Dwarf, Elf, Hobbit and Man, but bar the Dwarf these are further broken down into sub-species or cultures. For the Elf these are the Noldor, Sindar, and Silvan; Fallohides, Harfoots and Stoors for the

Hobbits; and for Man, the Dúnedain, the Middle Peoples, the Men of Darkness or Easterlings, and the Wild Men. Each race and subtype receives a number of abilities -- all Hobbits, for example, have "Six Meals a Day" (a bonus to the Craft: Cooking skill), Soft-Footed (makes them stealthy and difficult to track), "Sure at the Mark" (accurate with ranged combat) and "Tough as Old Tree Roots" (resistant to corrupting influence).

After determining race and background, a character receives their skills. These include their native lore and language skills -- based on his Wits attribute, plus a package representing their culture or background. One omission is the lack of a background package for Stoor Hobbits. Additionally all characters can take six picks from a list of skills and Edges for their race, though no guidelines are given on how many to spend on each. As a prospective GM for this game, I would suggest putting a limit, as there are other opportunities to pick up Edges in the generation process and Flaws in the game are limited to four per character.

Once the basic character is done, a profession or Order can be chosen. There are 12 basic ones provided in the game: Barbarian, Craftsmen, Loremaster, Magician, Mariner, Minstrel, Noble, Rogue, and Warrior. These are further divided into a "basic" catchall type, plus several specialities. For Craftsman, you have Basic Craftsman, plus Gardener, Innkeeper and Stonemason and for Mariner there is the Basic Mariner plus the Fisherman, Navy, Riverman and Shipwright. Each of these gives a package of skills, plus an Edge and points with which to augment the package's skills. In addition, a character must take an Ability for their Order, say Diver or Rope-craft for Mariner, Courtier or Domain for the Noble Order and so on. Finally, the character receives yet more picks to spend on their skills and Edges. Characters are rounded out with a measure of their Renown, which represents their reputation and their Courage, which are points to be spent like "Luck" or "Hero" points.

As a character gains enough experience, they can take an advancement, which provides several picks or points to spend on skills, Order abilities, Edges, attributes, Courage and the like. They can even spend a whole advancement to gain access to a whole other Order entirely, allowing them to do the equivalent of multi-classing. Characters can eventually advance into Elite Orders, which are the Archer, the Captain (of soldiers), the Knight, the Ranger, the Spy and the Wizard. Each has a requisite in order to qualify and gives more powerful Order Abilities. Although none of the "Fellowship of the Ring" appear in this book, it is more than possible to imagine their game statistics from reading through the character generation rules.

The thrust of character generation in *The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying* is to create a fairly high-skilled hero -- anyone "evil" in this game is the enemy! In the middle of the chapter on creating a hero is a two-fold spread explaining "The Qualities of Heroes" found in Middle Earth. This is both useful for those new to roleplaying -- having come to this game as a fan of the film, books, or Decipher's CCG -- and also to the more experienced of us who want a basic handle upon the characters.

Thankfully, and unlike the one provided in the *Star Trek Roleplaying Game Player's Guide*, the character sheet in *The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Game Core Book* is actually serviceable. It is very clear and unfussy, but not without its problems. The first of these being that the boxes in which to record character information are probably too small and the second is the lack of space for skill specialities. This will be very much of a problem when players come to note their Lore and Language skills and specialities. Only a single line is provided for each skill, but most characters begin with more than one of either skill.

Magic in *The Lord of the Rings RPG* is a very, very low-key affair, although most characters are capable of taking the Magician Order. A beginning Magician must take the "Spellcasting" Ability, which allows them just five spells. It can be selected multiple times to gain more spells. The Loremaster Order also provides access to the "Spellcasting" Ability, but only two spells per level of the ability. Spells run to Beast Speech, Smoke-Weaving, Blinding Flash, Slumber, and Opening-Spell of locks and so on. Magicians can cast any spell they know as often as they like, but need to make a test against the "Weariness Target Number" of the spell itself. If made, the spell is cast without problem, but if failed, the magician suffers a loss on their Weariness chart, which until they rest imposes a penalty to all other tests. Unlike other games, this one has no literal healing magic -- the Healing spell just provides a bonus to the actual skill. Player characters have access to wizardry, but there exists another type -- sorcery. This is its dark and evil counterpart, and provides a much greater degree of power. Wielded by Sauron and his cohorts, including Saruman, it corrupts and taints the very heart of its users. To measure this in the game, a character makes a test against their Willpower when

exposed to a corruptive influence, such as casting a sorcerous spell, being tempted to take an unheroic action or slipping on the One Ring. If they fail, they gain a point of Corruption and if they gain as many as their Bearing attribute they become a "Corrupt" character and thus an NPC. This rather nice mechanic neatly parallels the Sanity rules in *Call of Cthulhu*.

The rules on magic also cover magical items and like most spells are relatively weak in comparison with those seen in other games. Most of those items seen in the trilogy are discussed, from Dwarven doors, through Elven food, rope and cloaks, to blades such as Glamdring, Orcrist, Sting and Andúril. The first three of these have a +5 to all attack tests against Orcs only, while Andúril provides a +2 in attack tests and a +3 to inspire or intimidate. Beyond these are major enchanted items such as the Palantíri and the various rings of power, which are all discussed in detail.

As with their *Star Trek RPG*, *The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Game* employs Decipher's CODA system for its mechanics. To undertake any action or in game terms make a Test, a player rolls 2d6, adds any bonuses from their character's attribute, skills and other possible situational effects to beat a Target Number. Essentially, because this game deals with a far less complex setting and genre, the rules feel much lighter, and anyone with experience as a GM should have no problem with these mechanics. Claims could be made that it is similar to the *d20* system with its Class and Levels compared to Orders and Advancements. Although conceptually similar, the two are very different, especially in emphasis and feel. The CODA system is less intrusive and certainly not built around its method of modeling experience. The system is light and fast, as befitting the film it is trying to portray.

The section on combat is fairly short, but covers most eventualities. Given the general lack of healing available, melee tends towards being quite deadly, so characters will probably don decent armor and carry a shield. The former reduces damage taken, while the latter makes parry tests easier. Unarmed combat is also covered, but some details, such as damage are not immediately obvious as they are for weapons. An additional set of rules allow the GM to handle both battles and sieges, but they are fairly abstract and are not truly designed for the characters to get involved in the thick of things.

The chapters on narrating a chronicle for *The Lord of the Rings RPG* goes to some length to separate its style, setting and pacing from that of other fantasy RPGs. The emphasis is upon the GM getting the feel right -- it should be Tolkienesque epic fantasy as opposed to any other kind. This is a world of "black and white" (thus no Orcs with a conscience), heroism, tragedy, magic that is both subtle and powerful, and a world in which people have respect for their social superiors -- which may be a difficult for some players to come to grips with. While useful as a starting point, hopefully Decipher will expand upon this an example campaign and book for the GM. Specifically the setting for *The Lord of the Rings RPG* is understandably that of the time frame of the trilogy of the films -- or roughly so. It takes in the adventures of Bilbo Baggins as described in *The Hobbit* through to the aftermath of the War of the Ring, covering the end of the Third Age and the beginning of the Fourth. This does feel like quite a narrow time frame, but suggestions are made for running a chronicle outside of this period.

The book finishes with a guide to the "Servants of Shadow," beginning with the Lord of the Nazgûl and the other eight Ring Wraiths. The nearest that we get to seeing an experienced character are the write-ups of Saruman the White, Gollum, and Grima Wormtongue. The latter is on four advancements, while Saruman has taken 41. The write-up also contains the book's major editorial error -- a missing paragraph in his history. The other creature descriptions include the three types of Orcs, Trolls, and the Olog-Hai! More dangerous are the Fell-Beasts and Monsters, such as the Balrog of Moira, Barrow-Wights, Shelob and her ilk, the Mûmakil plus Wolves, Wargs and Werewolves -- though the very latter do feel a little out of place in Middle Earth.

Overall, *The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Game Core Book* provides just about everything necessary to play in Middle Earth, barring of course, an adventure. The rules are quite light and are less intrusive than in previous games based upon the license; the cinematic design is meant to emulate the feel and flow of the films and this they do well. The experienced gamer will pick this game up with little or no problem, but the same can not necessarily be said of those coming to the game afresh, say from just playing *The Lord of the Rings CCG* or just as fans of the films or books. Those who have played through the *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game* and looking to move on will have a slight advantage of course over total neophytes. This is not to say that the game does a bad job of introducing roleplaying, but it is not quite perfect in this respect and slightly better organization, an adventure and certainly the

step-by-step guideline to character generation would have been helpful.

If there is perhaps one thing missing for the game it is that sample adventure; it would be interesting to see what an adventure for this version of the "Middle Earth" license would be like, or better still, a campaign book that would model the intended epic scope discussed in the chapter on creating a chronicle for *The Lord the Rings RPG*. Despite this omission, *The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Game Core Book* is still an impressive package as a whole and the designers have done an excellent job of capturing both the feel of the film and the books.

--*Matthew Pook*

Headpiece Filled With Straw: The Scarecrow

"Mebbe it'll just beckon first. Mebbe it won't come after me. Not if I go when it beckons. I kind of figure it'll beckon when it wants me. I couldn't stand the other. I couldn't wait for it to come out here after me. I kind of feel it'll beckon. When it beckons, I'll be going."

-- Gwendolyn Ranger Wormser, "The Scarecrow" (1918)

It beckons. October, that is, and the slow death of the year, and what better time to look nervously over our shoulders as we pass the stubbled fields at the scarecrow keeping vigil? Scarecrow, mawkin, shoy-hoy, hodmadod, mammet, tattie-bogie, whatever you call him, he exists solely to instill fear. Clad in rags, stuffed with straw, he hangs on his cross at the edge of the field, moving in the wind. What's that? You didn't feel a wind just then? Listen closer, then; I could have sworn I heard the dry straw rustle . . .

"Hood promises to set up some mawkins to frighten them, but the mawkin nowadays is a poor creature compared with what he used to be, and it is a wonder that any experienced rook consents to be scared by him."

-- H. Rider Haggard, *A Farmer's Year* (1898)

Scarecrows are quite probably as old as agriculture itself. The Egyptians used hanging nets to scare away birds, and the Greeks set out hideous carved effigies of the god Priapus for the same purpose. The Zuni and Navajo hung dead crows from crosses to frighten the birds' surviving brethren; farmers in the Midwest and the Midlands alike still practice this primitive warding, as did Robinson Crusoe in Defoe's novel. (One briefly ponders what, besides the Turks, Vlad the Impaler was trying to scare away from his fields, by hanging so many dead *men* up on poles.) English farmers used to employ small boys or poor men as living scarecrows, to shout and threaten the birds in season. Some folklorists believe that in England after the Black Death, agricultural labor became too scarce for such practices, and straw men replaced the living ones.

The modern British scarecrow is usually traced to those effigies, and to the straw figure known as the "Jack-o-Lent," or "jackalent," set up during Lent as a target for stones and abuse. Whether because surviving Jacks got put to work in the fields, or because of a resemblance between the Jack-o-Lent and the scarecrow, the two terms rapidly became synonymous. Making a connection between the "Jack-o-Lent," the folk figure "Jack o' Kent" who used his ties to the Devil to unnaturally confine crows away from the crops, and the enigmatic "Jack Straw" of Kent, who helped lead the Peasant's Revolt of 1381, is very tempting indeed. Especially since nobody has the remotest idea where "Jack Straw" came from, who he was, or what happened to him in the end.

"I thank thee, Lord, that I am not as other scarecrows. I have said farewell to the ditch, the right-of-way, the rustling corn. I have eyes in my head. My mouth has been opened. On my finger is a ring, a sky-blue pentacle of power. Blood reddens my breast of straw and a heart roots in me. My mannikin heart has power to make a queen of England."

-- "White Ben," the scarecrow, in *The Arrogant History of White Ben*, by Clarence Dane (1939)

Could he have been an animated scarecrow, brought to life by witchcraft or by some Older Monarch seeking to overturn the *roi faineant*, Richard II? The scarecrow, like many a [mannikin](#) before or since, has been closely identified symbolically with the human soul -- which is, perhaps, why Baum's Scarecrow (like [Frankenstein's](#) Monster, another sewn-together simulacrum) specifically needed a brain. The scarecrow-soul, however, more closely resembles the Egyptian khaibit, the shadow produced on the universe by a human. The scarecrow becomes a kind of shell, a qliphothic entity of "shreds and tatters," made up of cast-off clothes and agricultural waste. However, its dried tassels and straws still retain a blasphemous life; Pennsylvania Dutch legend says that a male scarecrow, or bootzamon, must always have a bootzafraw, a female scarecrow, or he'll hunt up his own bride. ("Mawkin," it turns out, is cognate with "malkin," or female specter.) Rural lore hints that putting up one scarecrow always seems to "breed" more -- perhaps the vagrants and gypsies who wandered the fields swapping clothes with the scarecrows served to somehow pollinate this unwholesome species.

"The strongest argument of all in favour of considering the scarecrow a sacrifice to the powers of the wind and the storm and the hail, rather than the means of driving away undesirable intruders, is the fact generally admitted that it is

for the latter purpose a comparative failure."

-- Henry P. Maskell, "Scarecrows," in *The Treasury* (June, 1906)

If scarecrows becoming living men seems somehow wrong, then what about living men becoming scarecrows? British folklorists of the Frazer tradition speculated that the scarecrow is not intended to scare the crows, per se, but to somehow propitiate the gods of bane and misfortune. German farmers made wood-and-straw witch figures to draw the evil Winter out of the ground, and left them in the fields all summer. The scarecrow, in this reading, is not a totem but a scapegoat, the creature driven out of the town carrying the cast-off bad luck and sins of the community with it. The Roman priests threw twenty-seven straw effigies (!) known as the Argei off the Sublician Bridge into the Tiber every May 15; Dionysus of Halicarnassus says that Hercules instituted this ceremony to replace the human sacrifices previously offered to the god [Saturn](#) in this manner. It takes only a swig of imagination to picture the village scapegoat clad in rags and crucified in the fields, pelted with stones by passersby, and dying in final sacrifice to Saturn or his local avatar of skies and birds and weather -- and rings.

"so, don't be surprised

when you find crop circles on your lawn

Don't be afraid

it's only Alien Jesus

returned to take all deserving scarecrows

to their Heavenly cosmic reward."

-- Wildheart, "Alien Jesus Is Coming" (2000)

Because the other creepy thing in the crops comes, its worshipers say, from the heavens -- a divine message from ascended entities. Crop circles, most common in scarecrow-haunted Britain, appear to be created by some mysterious force pressing *down* on the stalks of grain, the fingermarks of gods reaching down to Earth. Do the circles appear now, when scarecrows have become thinner on the ground, as an interrogation -- or as a demand for a return to the ancient dialogue of scapegoat and god? Early legends speak of mysterious rings (such as Stonehenge) being the marks of giants; immense beings stretching up into (or down from) the sky. Crop circles often turn up near the odd British "chalk giants," enigmatic figures most clearly visible from a great distance up. If the scarecrows are effigies of men, could the crop circles be effigies of gods? The orb, or circle, or ring, is a timeless symbol of divinity -- and of timelessness, especially appropriate for Saturn's father Ouranos, the sky-god who gave birth to time itself. Are the scarecrows servitors of Saturn, placating his angry Skyfather, who leaves his own signature in the crops nearby?

"If faith be given

To ancient myth, no fowl has ever dared

To rest upon those branches . . .

Effigies of gods

Rude, scarcely fashioned from some fallen trunk

Held the mid space: and, pallid with decay,

Their rotting shapes struck terror. Thus do men

Dread most the god unknown."

-- Marcus Annaeus Lucan, *Pharsalia*, III:462-472

In Lucan's poem, written in 61 A.D. -- before the burning of the remaining sacred Sibylline Books in Nero's Fire -- we find a hint of the scarecrow's secret in his description of the Druid groves outside Massilia. The primal dread of the Druid groves is more than Panic fear ("no sylvan nymphs, nor Pan, found a home here," says Lucan); it's the numinous "god unknown", one not from the Earth. The Japanese scarecrow god, Shohodo-na-kami, dwells on the mountaintop (!) and comes down every spring to inhabit the scarecrows (his [abdal?](#)), from which vantage point he could see all. The birds carried messages between god and scarecrow; again, the purpose seems to be collusion, not protection. Finally, the scarecrows are ritually burnt in "The Ascent of the Scarecrow."

The scarecrow is not a sacrificed corn-king (European Corn Dollies are *never* left in the fields, but safely stored in barns) but a propitiation, an emissary, to the Lord of the Air served like Odin by the crows of the sky. The scarecrow might be an honored (or required) ambassador (or hostage) to the Parliament of Rooks, that mysterious conclave of

birds somehow connected with aerial intelligences. The scarecrow may even be accredited to the court of the [Roc](#), or serve as the Roc's representative on Earth. (After all, like the scarecrow, the Arabian roc dies in flames.) The scarecrow becomes a vessel for the divine (inhuman) consciousness, watching over the fields -- and the humans working therein. They become half-human, half-divine Watchers cast down from Heaven; [Nephilim](#), in other words. Sky Father is Watching You -- through the eyes of the scarecrow. As Eliot hinted, "There, the eyes are; and voices are, in the wind's singing." Hollow men. Stuffed men. Leaning together.

All Of This Has Happened Before

(. . . And It Will All Happen Again)

So last week I was in the middle of our narrator's meeting for our LARPs, and we were discussing various big plots that were coming up in the game.

(As an aside, even for those of you who don't like live-action games, I can definitely recommend trying to sit in on a narrator's meeting if possible. If they're anything like our meetings, you'll get to hear statements like, "Wait . . . you can't be the legless shambling zombie in that scene; you're already the insane senator!" But I digress . . .)

Anyway, we're tossing out various plot ideas, and one member of our group had a refrain of "been done."

"Why don't we have an adventure where the bad guys try to take their headquarters?"

"Been done. We did something like that six months ago."

"Well, what if their headquarters disappears, and they need to look for it?"

"Been done. We had that plot four months ago."

"Well, what if . . ."

"Been done."

Well, after a while, you start to get the idea that no ideas are good enough, and everything is derivative.

For example, let's take an incredibly popular story. It is a time of war. Our motley band of thrown-together misfits -- outmanned and outgunned -- learn of an unstoppable machine rapidly approaching the good guys' last stand. If they can't think of a way -- against all odds -- to stop the device with a desperate shot against the machine's weak point, it may well give the bad guys a huge advantage in the war.

I'm talking, of course, about *Saving Private Ryan*.

Anyway, one of the first rules they teach you in the ol' creative writing classes (where they teach you to write instead of do something constructive for society) is that, indeed, it *has* all been done. It's been argued that there are only five or so basic stories; opinions differ on what those five are, although I've seen it pared down to two: "The hero leaves" or "A stranger arrives." I've even seen one author boil it down to one (admittedly with a colon) -- "Worlds collide: A love story." Anyway, the point is, beating yourself up because *you* see similarities in two plots -- or worse, not doing the story simply because you've done something similar -- is a fool's game. Even two plots that are extremely similar when pared down to their essentials (which, again, is many) will play out very differently. Conversely, two plots that are extremely different can *feel* the same (usually to their detriment) if the trappings are too similar.

Well, then, if the would-be plot-meister (as we *Saving Private Ryan*-watching German-speakers might say) isn't supposed to be too concerned about duplicating stories, then how do you keep them from all looking alike?

Simply put, execution. The hows of a plot are infinitely more important than the whats. Let's look at a few elements that make plots different, and how we might use them.

Motivation

Given how goal-oriented many RPG adventures are, it's surprising how much of a difference the change of a motivation will make. Someone who robs a bank to buy Shiny Things is radically different than one who robs a bank to afford a life-saving operation for his mother. Yes, the basic plot is identical, but the reactions and resolutions of the heroes may well be radically different. One of the (few) interesting things about *Star Trek: Generations* [OBLIGATORY SPOILER ALERT] is that the bad guy is motivated entirely by a desire to . . . well, live in a little fantasy world; the entire thrust of the plot revolves around the bad guy blowing up a star so he can alter the path of an

astrophysical anomaly that will transport him to a make-believe world of happiness. That's a new and different reason to blow up a star. (In fact, I think one of the movie's many mistakes was in making the star system he blew up inhabited; it would have been a much more interesting moral quandary, in my mind, if the system was otherwise completely unimportant. So long as it harm none, how much right does some whacko have to alter the universe to make himself happy? If having a campfire makes someone mildly happy, why shouldn't someone be allowed to blow up a star to make himself infinitely happy?) [END OBLIGATORY SPOILER ALERT]

The motivations of those behind a plot can be myriad, and can even directly affect the eventual outcome. Let's take a run-of-the mill kidnapping. In one plot the kidnappers might intend to sacrifice the victim to some dark power. In another the kidnapper might be related to the victim and has crafted a ransom request to throw suspicion off him. In yet another the kidnapper might believe the victim *will* be used to summon some dark power, and has proactively kidnapped the victim to keep him away from those who (supposedly) want him. (Is he a prophet, or a nut?) And so on. Unless the players are steam-powered die-rolling automatons, the results should be different for them each time.

"Or Else . . ."

Similar to motivation, the consequences for failure can be radically different for two identical plots. For example, the heroes need to acquire the "Orb of Malarquie" from the bottom of the huge dungeon, or else the world will be destroyed. Okie-doke. Standard stuff, really. Now . . . let's look at what "destroyed" means. Well, there's the obvious one:

"If the Orb isn't acquired, the world will blow up with a big ol' 'kaboom.'"

But let's look at some others:

- "If the Orb isn't acquired, all those without magical abilities will turn irredeemably evil."
- "If the Orb isn't acquired, The Marquis Malarquie will be summoned, destined to reign with an iron fist for millennia."
- "If the Orb isn't acquired, Love will die."

And so on.

The consequences don't normally enter into the basic notion of the plot; after all, the Good Guys are expected to prevail, so in some ways it doesn't really matter *what* the result of failure is. But the adventure will feel different depending on the outcome. The motivations which lead to other possible consequences can all be interesting and different; what kind of antagonist would wish to see Love die . . . and does this outcome hold any kind of seductive appeal for a PC who has recently been horribly spurned in a romantic subplot?

Time

If the idea is to differentiate otherwise similar adventures, the answer can be as simple as having a respectable gulf in time between the two. After all, if Superman could never save another kid from a burning building, there would be about 20 panels less of Superman in your average year's worth of comic.

There are two aspects of time here to consider. First is the merely temporal. If it's been two years since you've had a blackout storyline in your gritty city adventure, you can probably do another one without the players rolling their eyes. On the other hand, if it's been three weeks since your last "bomb-in-an-orphanage" story, you should probably hold off for a while. There is no hard-and-fast rule here; generally speaking, the longer it takes you to realize that you've run a similar adventure, the more likely it is that enough time has passed.

But perhaps more importantly, time between similar adventures can serve as a means to show how the characters have evolved. For example, while the final plots to *Star Wars* and *Return of the Jedi* are very similar ("Gotta destroy the Death Star!"), the gulf in time -- and the evolution of the characters -- makes them very different. Having two adventures with similar plots can actually be a *good* thing in this regard, especially if the heroes didn't resolve the

matter optimally the first time. If the Vigil Auntie was too inexperienced and untrained to handle the hostage situation in her first year, how will she fare in a similar situation years later?

Novelty

Finally (at least for this laundry list), the more novel a plot is, the less likely it is to be reusable without significant alteration. Something fairly generic, like an invading army, can probably be used multiple times. But if you have a really different story -- like a new character that joins the party, only to be revealed as an evil infiltrator -- then you probably can't use it again in the same campaign (although you should always feel free to use them across multiple campaigns, like the "[front-door villain](#)").

Remember that no plot has ever survived contact with the players, and even the most derivative story will take on a life of its own once the PCs get their hands on it. Be aware of the dangers of repeating plots, and take some steps to make sure it doesn't happen again, but don't lose any sleep over it.

Of course, you've probably already heard this advice before . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

*Last week's answer: **Apples to Apples***

(Three stars) "A recent training technique for breaking stubborn monsters of their negative habits is liberal application of bad film or music. After a firm admonishment of the monster's wrongdoing, the trainer takes the creature and locks it in a room with the multimedia."

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Designer's Notes: Special Ops, Third Edition

"The Man in the Arena"

by William Toporek

"It is not the critic who counts, not the one who points out how the strong man stumbled or how the doer of deeds might have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred with the sweat and dust and blood; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows that great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, if he wins, knows the triumph of high achievement; and who, if he falls, at least falls while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

--Theodore Roosevelt

When Steve and Phil came to me and asked if I could "take a look" at the *Special Ops* book for some slight changes before we reprint it, I jumped at the chance to "put things right" for my brothers in the Special Operations Community. After taking a long hard look at the book I realized that so much has changed since the *2nd Edition* which was printed back in 1999. Back then, the author/revisor, John Goff, went in and spent most of his time changing the template system and upgrading a few areas here and there to reflect our new format style. Unfortunately, he kept most of the information text that dated back to 1990. I felt that only a complete revision would bring this book up to date and reflect the "Quiet Professionals" of this new century.

I began my revision work and was soon informed that we would bring in Hans-Christian Vortisch as a technical expert in the areas of equipment, weapons, and vehicles. I jumped at the chance to work with him. Since Hans is from Germany, this would give the book the international feel that we were searching for. He would be a great insight into the foreign Special Operations Community as well as provide up-to-date technical information on his areas of expertise. It would be a good match. I would provide the information on the U.S. and he would handle the foreign sections and augment my knowledge and experience of Special Operations.

We began the work in November 2001. As we attempted to sort out the chapters it became evident that each of us wanted to change different things as well as much of the same. It was determined that we work in tandem and that each of us make our changes to existing materials and that I would "pre-edit" the final copy. So much had been overlooked or had changed since 1990 that we felt that a standard 128-page book was not enough to accurately cover the material. After much begging were granted an additional 16 pages.

Our first big hurdle was in the area of skills. We were going to add a few new templates and keep the rest basically the same, taking out some skills and adding others to reflect the up to date information. Then came *GURPS WW2*. This book threw our template system for a loop and put Sean Punch, Hans, Gene Seabolt, and myself in a big discussion of what changes we had to include. Lots of back-and-forth discussion on the Tactics skill and the subsequent required specializations. End result: *GURPS WW2*-style took over. Hence the increased cost of all the templates due to these individual skills. This also prompted the addition of Soldier, Sailor, and Aviation skills to the appropriate templates and the crossovers for these skills (as most Special Operators who are on the ground *have* to have Soldier). We revamped all the templates, adding in the current Special Warfare Schools of all countries. We integrated Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape (SERE) school to those "high risk for capture" templates and made sure that almost everyone could survive in the woods. Ironically, the 2nd edition omitted the Survival[Woodlands] skill from all the templates.

Many, many other changes followed, mostly in the areas of equipment, vehicles, and overall "World" changes. Some organizations changed their names, some disappeared, a few became integrated with other forces, and many military schools changed. New terrorist organizations have popped up. An extensive coverage of Osama bin Laden's Al Quaida was added and an updated world terrorist listing was added as well. The U.S. Military Pay Table was omitted because we felt that this information was much too date-specific and complicated for the casual user to read (the U.S. Military

Pay is increased every few years, providing congress approves the usual 5% increase). A consolidated weapons table was added to include not only Special Operations-specific weapons but the favorites of many militarys all over the world, so that the reader does not have to go through two or three more **GURPS** books to build bad guys.

The biggest change is in the artwork. Phil Reed was a big help here starting it all off with that fantastic cover. We really needed to get rid of the "John Eric Hexum" bad gas-mask-wearing, teeth-clinching, hip-firing yo-yos that were good back in the late 80s. The new "Silent Option" HALO jumper cover gives the reader the feel that we are looking for: silent, professional, risk-taking, skilled. The rest of the artwork is done in the **GURPS Cops** and **GURPS WW2** style with real pictures "stylized" through a filter. The work done by Heather Oliver and Gene Seabolt is just outstanding. All of the photos are from the U.S. Military/Special Operations/DOD as well as several foriegn countries. The majority of the photos were gathered by myself with the aid of Carol Darby over at U.S. Army Special Operations Command Public Affairs Office. For these accurate "real" photos we are thankful to the Armed Forces Public Affairs Offices all over the globe that helped.

Unfortunately, even with the additional pages we had to omit some interesting text. The CIA Special Activities Division (SAD) template was removed because we felt that one template was not accurate to the wide scope that those operatives filled. It was replaced with a generic filler pointing to **GURPS Espionage** to fill the hole. Here is the CIA (SAD) Prototype Template:

CIA (SAD)

146 points

The Basic Skills for an operative of the CIA's Special Activities Division.

Attributes: ST 11 [10], DX 13 [30], IQ 14 [45], HT 11 [10].

Advantages: Fit [5], Administrative Rank 1 [5], and 25 points in *Desirable Advantages* (p. 51), *Decorations* (p. 51), *Administrative Rank* (p. 52) or *Patrons* (p. 54).

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], and -25 points selected from the *Desirable Disadvantages* list (p. 56).

Basic Skills: Acting (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Administration (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-12, Armory (Small Arms) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Brawling (P/E) DX [1]-13, Camouflage (M/E) IQ+1 [1]-14, Climbing (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Computer Operation (M/E) IQ-1 [1]-13, Criminology (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Cryptanalysis (M/H) IQ [4]-14, Cryptography (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-13, Cryptology (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-12, Demolition (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-12, Detect Lies (M/H) IQ-3 [1/2]-11, Diplomacy (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-13, Disguise (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Driving (Automobile) (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Electronics (Comm) (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-12, Electronics (Security Systems) (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-13, Electronics Operation (Comm) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Electronics Operation (Security Systems) (M/A) IQ [2]-14, Electronics Operation (Sensors) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Escape (P/H) DX-1 [2]-12, Fast-Talk (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13, First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-13, Forgery (M/H) IQ [4]-14, Forward Observer (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Garrote (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Gunner (Machine Gun) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-13*, Gunner (SAM) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-13*, Guns (Grenade Launcher) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (LAW) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (Pistol) (P/E) DX [1]-15*, Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (Shotgun) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Hiking (P/A) HT [2]-11, Holdout (M/A) IQ[2]-14, Intelligence Analysis (M/H) IQ+1 [6]-15, Interrogation (M/A) IQ [2]-14, Intimidation (M/A) IQ [2]-14, Jumping (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Knife (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Knife Throwing (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Language (any) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-12, Leadership (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-12, Lockpicking (M/A) IQ [2]-14, NBC Warfare (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-12, No-Landing Extraction (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Orienteering (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-12, Parachuting (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Photography (M/A) IQ [2]-14, Politics (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-12, Psychology (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-12, Savoir-Faire (Other Culture) (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-13, Scrounging (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-13, Shadowing (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Stealth (P/A) DX [2]-13, Streetwise (M/A) IQ [2]-14, Survival (Urban) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Survival (Woodlands) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-12, Swimming (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Tactics (Air to Ground) (M/H) IQ-3 [1/2]-11, Tactics (Counterterrorist) (M/H) IQ-3 [1/2]-11, Tactics (Guerrilla) (M/H) IQ-3 [1/2]-11, Tactics (Infantry) (M/H) IQ-3 [1/2]-11, Teaching (M/A) IQ [2]-14, Throwing (P/H) DX-2 [1]-11, Traffic Analysis (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-12, Traps (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-12.

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Customization Notes: This template is intended for use in a 200-point campaign; spend the remaining 35 points to customize your character. Another -15 points in *Acceptable Disadvantages* (p. 56) and five quirks can be taken to get

a further 20 points.

"For the Operators, whom a wise commander uses with great skill and forethought, and whom the fool throws away in ignorance and contempt."

--Greg Walker

The Air Force Pararescue Jumper (PJOC) template was omitted for both space and because it was not really in the realm of Special Operations. I know that this is a very touchy spot, but they are not commandos, force multipliers, or counter-terrorist team members. They go in when everything goes wrong. While having a bunch of players be a PJOC team would be fun and enjoyable experience, except they usually operate in teams of two, rescuing downed pilots and aircrews and that's about it . . . not really good for a group of four to seven players. Their missions are, more often than not, quick and have little combat. They go in, find the downed aircraft/helicopter, land, get out (or parachute, rope down, get out of the helicopter/airplane somehow), secure the area, find the survivors, medically stabilize them, then await extraction. Missions last less than a few hours, most only a few minutes, which isn't terribly suited for campaigns. Here is the prototype PJOC Template:

PJOC

126 points

The Basic Skills for U.S. Air Force Pararescue Jumper appear below. NCOs, warrant officers or commissioned officers, and characters who have foreign language or advanced training, will have the appropriate Special Skills package(s) as well, which will increase template cost.

Attributes: ST 11 [10], DX 12 [20], IQ 13 [30], HT 12 [20].

Advantages: Fit [5], and 20 points in *Desirable Advantages* (p. 51), *Decorations* (p. 51), *Military Rank* (p. 52) or *Patrons* (p. 54).

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], and -20 points selected from the *Desirable Disadvantages* list (p. 56).

Basic Skills: Airman (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14, Armoury (Small Arms) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Brawling (P/E) DX [1]-12, Camouflage (M/E) IQ [1]-13, Climbing (P/A) DX [2]-12, Diagnosis (M/H) IQ+2 [8]-15, Electronics Operation (Comm) (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Escape (P/H) DX-1 [2]-11, First Aid (M/E) IQ+1 [4]-15, Gunner (Machine Gun) (P/A) DX-1 [1]-13*, Guns (Grenade Launcher) (P/E) DX [1]-14*, Guns (LAW) (P/E) DX [1]-14*, Guns (Light Automatic) (P/E) DX [1]-14*, Guns (Pistol) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-13*, Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX [1]-14*, Hiking (P/A) HT-1 [1]-11, Jumping (P/E) DX [1]-12, Knife (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-11, Leadership (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Lifting (P/H ST) ST-1 [2]-10, Mechanic(Aircraft) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, No-Landing Extraction (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14, NBC Warfare (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Orienteering (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Parachuting (P/E) DX+1 [2]-13, Savoir-Faire (Military) (M/E) IQ [1]-13, Scrounging (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Scuba (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Soldier (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Spear (P/A) DX-1[1]-11, Stealth (PA) DX [2]-12, Survival (Desert) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Survival (Jungle) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Survival (Mountains) (M/A) IQ-2[1/2]-11, Survival (Woodlands) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Swimming (P/E) DX [1]-12, Tactics (Infantry) (M/H) IQ-3 [1/2]-10, Throwing (P/H) DX [4]-12.

*Includes +2 for IQ.

Special Skills:

*Commissioned Officer or Warrant Officer*** (+5 points): Increase Leadership to 14 [3]; add Administration (M/A) IQ [2]-13.

Foreign Language (+2, 4 or 6 points): Add Language (any) (M/A) IQ [2]-13 (Basic), IQ+1 [4]-14 (Intermediate) or IQ+2 [6]-15 (Advanced).

*NCO*** (+1 1/2 points): Increase Leadership to 13 [1]; add Administration (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11. **Customization**

Notes: Spend your remaining points (15 points, in a 150-point campaign) to customize your character. Another -10 points in *Acceptable Disadvantages* (p. 56) and five quirks can be taken to get a further 25 points.

The last template type omitted was the Aviation template. Hans suggested that we have an Army/Air Force mixed template to reflect the 160th SOAR and the Air Force's Special Operations Command. Again this template would be extremely varied and the skills so different between the two that it would be nearly impossible to accurately depict this

soldier/airman. Another problem faced with this template would be the basic skills compared to other templates. They would not meet the requirements set out by our text for Special Operators. These men are not "Operators"; they are *highly* skilled in their jobs. They are the best helicopter pilots and fixed wing pilots that the U.S. Military has, but they are not Special Operations Forces. Here is the prototype Special Operations Aviator Template:

U.S. Special Operations Aviator

82 points

All Aviators are either Officers or Warrant Officers and start out with Military Rank 3. They do not require the Fit Advantage.

Attributes: ST 10 [0], DX 12 [20], IQ 13 [30], HT 10 [0].

Advantages: Acceleration Tolerance [10], Military Rank 3 [15]. Additional points, depending on campaign, may be taken in *Desirable Advantages* (p. 51), *Decorations* (p. 51), *Military Rank* (p. 52) or *Patrons* (p. 54).

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], and -20 points selected from the *Desirable Disadvantages* list (p. 56).

Basic Skills: Administration (M/A) IQ-2 [1]-12, Armoury (Small Arms) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Brawling (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-11, Camouflage (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Climbing (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-10, Computer Operation (M/E) IQ [1]-13, Electronics Operation (Comm) (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Electronics Operation (Sensors) (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14, First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Gunner (Cannon) (P/A) DX [2]-14*, Gunner (Missile) (P/A) DX-2 [2]-14*, Guns (LAW) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-13*, Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-13*, Guns (Pistol) (P/E) DX+1 [1/2]-13*, Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-13*, Leadership (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Navigation (M/H) IQ [4]-13, NBC Warfare (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Orienteering (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Savoir-Faire (Military) (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Soldier (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Spear (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-10, Survival (Woodlands) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Tactics (Air to Air) (M/H) IQ-3 [1/2]-10, Tactics (Air to Ground) (M/H) IQ [4]-13 Throwing (P/H) DX-3 [1/2]-9, Traffic Analysis (M/H) IQ-3 [1/2]-10

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Specialization:

Must choose a type of piloting specialization that the aviator is skilled in:

Fixed Wing (Turbo Prop) (+16 Points): Add Piloting (Multi-Engine Prop) (P/A) DX+2 [16]-15. Remove Soldier and Replace with Aviation at same level.

Fixed Wing (Jet) (+16 Points): Add Piloting (Multi-Engine Jet) (P/A) DX+2 [16]-15. Remove Soldier and replace with Aviation at same level.

Rotary Wing (+16 Points): Add Piloting (Rotary Wing) (P/A) DX+2 [16]-15

Foreign Language (+2, 4 or 6 points): Add Language (any) (M/A) IQ [2]-13 (Basic), IQ+1 [4]-14 (Intermediate) or IQ+2 [6]-15 (Advanced).

Customization Notes: Spend your remaining points (48 points, in a 150-point campaign) to customize your character. Another -20 points in *Acceptable Disadvantages* (p. 56) and five quirks can be taken to get a further 25 points.

It takes so much time and research to create a book but I think the effort that all of us: our friends (Military and Civilian), family, and coworkers have put into this book has made it something great. I believe that this is *the best* reference book for gaming Special Operations Forces that is on the market. For all of us it was a labor of love.

"You sleep well in your bed at night only because a few rough men are willing to do violent things on your behalf."
--G. Orwell

Eden, the Lost Colony

by Elizabeth McCoy

Once upon a time, there was a genetic engineer who was employed on a planet with somewhat low gravity, but a high-density atmosphere. The terraforming process would be slow enough that it was more cost- and time-effective to "meet the planet halfway." While others worked on introducing terrestrial ecosystems, the gengineer crafted modifications for humans that would enable them to survive in the thicker atmosphere.

But the project was plagued with accidents (or lack of funding), and soon only the gengineer was left on the planet, working alongside automated terraforming machines. Needing assistants, however, the gengineer decided to *craft* some -- which had the added benefit of testing the alterations to lungs and bones.

With a bit of whimsy, however, the gengineer decided to add wings. Not only would these suit aesthetic concerns, but they would have two other benefits. First, they would enable the constructs to travel more easily, and second, it would enhance the difference between the constructs and the eventual human inhabitants. (It should be said that the primary reason was probably to bolster the gengineer's ego -- a Creator should have angels, right?)

Of course, the karma attached to the imagery might have made the wings a bad choice . . .

The first angel-constructs worked perfectly, and helped to make others; then it came time to create the humans who would eventually inherit the planet.

With the human babies floating in their tanks, something happened -- a disaster or accident which drove the gengineer to seek refuge in a stasis chamber (or freeze tube, depending on technology), leaving the angels with the duty of caring for the terraforming machines, laboratories, and the little colonists-to-be.

All worked well enough for a time, with the constructs more-or-less devoted to their tasks. (Depending on the technology level, the little humans were either decanted and raised by the "angels," or appropriate dreamgame programs were piped into their tanks, so that they could continue to terraform for another decade or two.)

But one day, an angel discovered the datafile required to create more angels, and realized that the constructs could -- artificially -- have children of their own, and not be subordinate to the humans they were caring for. This angel, naturally, spread the good news around . . . and suggested that the non-winged humans should be, at best, equals, and perhaps even servants! (In the background can be heard the sound of karma exceeding the speed limit.)

The angels who were loyal to humans were in the majority, and drove the rebellious ones away, but the chaos naturally imprinted itself upon the humans (either as children, with their lives disrupted, or as adults released from their growth tanks a few years early, forced to venture out in confusion). Further, the gengineer's cold-sleep chamber was blocked off in the confusion.

Now, while the angel-constructs are long-lived, they're not immortal. The damage the rebels did to the terraforming machinery caused many of the loyalists to feel that they'd be failing the Creator if they did not finish the terraforming. Likewise, the rebels didn't want to just die off. Raids were made, equipment was stolen, mountain strongholds were established. Angel-children were grown in the precious tanks. Time passed, and an equilibrium was established.

The Planet

Eden is low-gravity, metal-poor, and with a high atmospheric density. It also tends to have ferocious storms. But it *did* start out with an oxy-nitrogen atmosphere and in the "life zone" of its sun. That made it relatively easy to terraform. If habitable planets are common, Eden's quirks may have made other colonists skip over it -- leaving it open to settlement by someone with more ambition than sense. (See below for more detailed planetary statistics.)

The Technology

While the original tech level (9+) was sufficient for the genetic engineering of such things as an extra pair of limbs (wings) -- though such modifications were considered inappropriately or illegally drastic for "pure humans" -- and there are sufficient repair facilities for the *really* important equipment . . . some of the materials are simply too hard to produce. (And, perhaps more importantly, the loyalist angels don't want certain items to fall into the hands of the rebels, and therefore keep them under careful guard.) Therefore, the general TL of the planet wavers between 3 (Medieval) and 4 (Renaissance/Colonial), with occasional forays into TL5 (steam power and medicine, mostly).

Those who live near angels tend to have a higher quality of health care; the loyalists feel it's part of their job to heal those in need, while the rebels have learned that they get more loyal servants if they have a carrot as well as a stick to offer. However, the rebels have less high tech equipment to work with, and it's often in worse condition.

Who's Where

The terraformed continent is split into roughly three sections -- the territory where the loyalist angels are strongest, a "contested" area where standard (light-grav, dense-atmosphere breathing) humans are the primary powers, and the rebel section where ordinary humans are serfs and servants to the rebel angels.

Loyalist Lands

Since the Creator made only a specific number of construct assistants, the loyalist angels will only create replacements for their numbers, reproducing their individual "lines" down the generations. (This is done via cloning, with genetic engineering correcting for any errors that might have crept into the code.) The original names are likewise passed down, though more as titles: the current Rafael may well be Rafael Maria, referred to as simply Maria as a child, until she succeeds to her predecessor's post. There are occasional "twins," for posts when the apprenticeship is dangerous enough that the apprentice might be killed. There are a few new names, however -- if more than one holder of a given name defects to the rebel side, the name is deemed unlucky, and a new one is chosen.

Young loyalist angels are educated and trained for their jobs: medical, terraforming, general repair, human outreach, and so on. Many of them are assigned work in the outer world as their "senior year," looking for pockets of rebel-sympathizers, carrying messages, transporting medicine to the sick, or ferrying patients to the strongholds where the medical tech is.

Human Lands

Most of the "gray areas" of the land are villages and towns, with various kinds of governments. Most of them at least pay lip service to representative democracy. Some, near the rebel territories, are suspicious of any flying beings. Others, near the loyalist strongholds, are immediately trusting of angels. Human communities near the rebel lands are rumored to take slaves! (They *say* it's indenturement, but the rumors persist.)

Human occupations include medics, farmers, craftsmen, and the ever-popular politics and religion.

Rebel Lands

The rebel angels, believing that they have equal rights to children as "pure" humans do, reproduce themselves to the limits of their technology and resources. The angels with access to the growth-tanks typically provide themselves with heirs and guards first, then service their fellows' needs for children or clones. With more angels, many created by genetic blendings (as children of two -- or more -- constructs), there are more names required . . . and more variation. Indeed, aside from interesting mutations, there are engineered ones. Natural weaponry, perhaps, or an attempt at stronger muscles, more efficient wing structure, or infrared vision. Not all of these projects work as advertised . . .

Once sufficient rebels have banded together, they generally claim an area of land and attract (or kidnap) human servants and serfs. So long as the rebels are venerated appropriately, they don't care how the humans rule themselves. Many settle for tithing of goods and slaves, though others enjoy meddling with their nearby fiefdoms politics -- or simply descending to wreak havoc, party, and wench.

There is a *very* persistent rumor that the rebel angels practice brain transplants -- that the eldest angels grow clones of themselves, and then select one to provide their next body. Indeed, some of them claim that they were among the original rebels. Other folk (loyalist angels and educated humans, primarily) state that this is merely hype -- even if they had the technology for brain transplants (which they don't, of course), the state of such a brain would be less than sane after so much time . . .

What is deemed only a rumor (and is *not*) is that the rebels are attempting to create a non-sterile aquatic species. In fact, there are two separate projects going on in different conclaves: selkies and mermaids (see below).

Plot Seeds

- **Raiders of the Lost Artifacts** -- A researcher has discovered data about this lost colony that suggests Precursor artifacts from a vanished race might be located there. Enter the heroes as assistants (or at least ship-crew). With a bit of careful searching of the general area (which might turn up pirate bases, covert government bases, stealthed prototype ships, or simply a secret raid into an enemy empire's territory), "Eden" can be located . . . Whether the rumor of lost technology is correct or not, the engineer responsible might be found. Hopefully, the tales of the Creator's protection -- such as monsters in "mystic sleep" and "deadly golems" -- are exaggerations . . .
- **What Do Angels Need With a Starship?** -- Passing by the area, a faint, old signal (presumably an SOS one, from the repetition) is detected by the ship the party is on. Investigating leads to a mountain fastness that was recently taken over by the rebels -- but not before one of the loyalists was able to activate what she believed was a "last ditch defense" (the signal). Meddling do-gooders will find a long, deep-seated hostility between "kin," that additional high technology might help; unethical sorts may be tempted by the rebels' offers of slaves and genetic engineering data. (Sufficiently naive shipcrew could result in the rebels gaining control of a starship of their own, with which to rule the planet!)
- **Swiss Shipcrew Robinson** -- Downed by mechanical malfunctions or hostile action (or both), the group's only hope to get spaceborne again is to find the old factory site where the terraforming machines were constructed. (What few terraforming machines are left are all meant to be serviced in the field; if they break down *too* much, they must be abandoned.) Naturally, this involves getting to a site deep in rebel territory -- or, if the PCs are alien enough to be accepted by the rebels, loyalist territory! Or perhaps both, for the materials warehouse that's not been used up and the facilities to machine the parts . . .
- **People for the Ethical Treatment of Androids** -- The PCs are from a "construct-tolerant" society -- or are extremists within a less-tolerant civilization -- and are only a few steps ahead of more conservative elements. Can the constructs -- indeed, the entire planet, if the "normal" humans there are "too altered" -- be saved from slavery or destruction? Will the loyalists and rebels set aside their long-held hostility to present a united front, or will they refuse to believe they're in danger? (Rebels might scorn aid and advice from "mere humans" while loyalists might be unable to believe they're in danger from legitimate governmental forces.)

Variations

- **GURPS Traveller** -- This planet apparently came from the same place that Vargr and other non-Solomani came from . . . But what if the Creator is still in stasis, hidden in an underground complex? (See [GURPS Traveller: Alien Races 3](#) for spoiler-laden revelations about why discovering the Creator would be so shocking -- and potentially dangerous!)
- **Transhuman Space:** For the most shocking effect, the colony is on Pluto, and is far less advanced . . . Alternatively, it's located in a beehived asteroid which is -- slowly -- accelerating out-system. Can responsible PCs explain to the carefully-indoctrinated angel crew that their home really isn't self-supporting enough to head

out into deep space? (The angels' wings are probably smaller, especially if the habitat is zero-g.)

Descriptions, including Fiddly Mechanics Details

Planet Statistics: Eden orbits a G3 V star (the rest of the system can be detailed by the GM to support any adventure needs or hooks; interesting system phenomena may attract player characters). Its gravity is .72 G, and it has a dense (1.3× Earth-normal) oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere. The climate is slightly cooler than Earth's, and the axial tilt is slightly less (12 degrees). The land-mass percentages are approximately the same as Earth's, with the primary terrain types of Mountainous and Plains. Only the largest continent is inhabited at this time, but all have been terraformed. (The frequent storms make sea travel relatively hazardous, and without population pressure, colonization efforts have been neglected.)

Because of the terraforming, only harmless native plants and bugs persist on land; aquatic animals are more likely to be native and poisonous to terran stock. (Fortunately, the most dangerous native creature is a slow, fox-sized, solitary, shark-like fish which travels in pairs during mating seasons.)

Racial Templates

Standard Eden Human: The base human has been altered to breathe a dense atmosphere and function normally in a lighter gravity; this comes at the expense of being able to function in normal atmospheric densities and gravities (i.e., to them, Earth would have thin air and be high-grav). Their technology is primitive by angel standards (-4TL, -20 points, in *GURPS* terms), but they have no other special advantages or disadvantages.

Angel: The typical angel is even-featured, between five feet tall to 5'5", and very slender, between 90 and 120 pounds -- much of this due to their bird-like bones. Their wingspan is approximately two and a half times their height, with the wings rising about another foot above their heads when folded into the "resting" position. They are quite good at gliding (much like terrestrial albatrosses), capable of breathing both the planet's normal atmosphere, and the thinner air in the higher reaches of the sky, and are also able to shrug off the colder climes there. Their efficient metabolisms manage to do this with little more food intake than normal humans. Psychologically, they tend to be very much like their non-corporeal inspirations: kind, cooperative, and dutiful. Indeed, their group-oriented socialization causes them to seek out others -- few are good "loners."

In *GURPS* terms, angels have the advantages of Attractive Appearance [5], Disease-Resistant [5], Fit [5], Literacy [0], Longevity [5], Musical Ability +4 [4], Temperature Tolerance +5 [5], Pressure Support [5], and Winged Flight [24]. They have the disadvantages of Chummy [-5], Fragile [-20], and Sterile [-3]. (This gives them a racial cost of 30 points.)

Common advantages (found in certain lineages) are Absolute Direction, Absolute Timing, Acute Vision, 3D Spatial Sense, Perfect Balance, and Voice. (Voice is *very* common.) Common physical disadvantages also run in lineages, such as Albinism and Low Pain Threshold. Mental disadvantages due to upbringing may include Charitable, Cannot Harm Innocents, Code of Honor (Gentleman's; substitute normal humans for women), Compulsive Generosity, Curious, Easy to Read, Honesty, Phobia (enclosed spaces), and Truthfulness.

Rebel Angel: The rebel angels have modified themselves and suffered mutations due to engineering equipment in poor repair. While *most* of them have the same advantages and disadvantages as their loyalist kin (including the dislike of being alone!), everything is mutable; some have leathery or furred wings instead of feathery ones, or are even wingless! (Even if winged, some are flightless due to excessive bone density.) So far, they have not managed to create non-sterile daughters who can survive childbirth, nor sons capable of interbreeding with the humans and producing angels; they are dependant on the cloning tanks.

Though they are frequently a nasty crowd, convinced that they deserve better than humans and loyalist angels, they are equally frequently devoted to their immediate families -- especially their children. This may mean they shelter truly monstrous creatures as treasured members of their brood . . .

Common advantages include those found in loyalists, as well as Ally Group (family) Ambidextrous, Claws, Double-Jointed, Extra Arms (tail), High Pain Threshold, Night Vision, Pheromone Control, Teeth, and Toughness,.

Common disadvantages are the same as the physical flaws of the loyalists, as well as Alcoholism, Appearance (Unattractive or worse), Bad Temper, Bully, Dependants (children), Intolerance (non-rebels or non-angels), Jealousy, Manic-Depressive, Megalomania, Mute, Odious Personal Habits (usually pertaining to treatment of humans), Phobia (enclosed spaces), Sadism, Skinny, Unusual Biochemistry, and other problems suitable to a touchy society whose "religion" is based on being able to have children -- no matter how warped. (Some very flawed rebels may even have Bestial, Short Lifespan, or Stress Atavism!)

Selkies and Mermaids: Both of these projects may have modifications as per the rebels, but start with the same basic angel template.

A "Selkie" adds Amphibious [10]; they have furred wings and webbed fingers, but are still able to take to the air -- and are still Sterile.

A "Mermaid" is no longer capable of flight, but still has streamlined wings to "fly" underwater. They also have the Gills advantage [10], allowing them to function both above and below water, and they are *not* sterile. This subtracts 11 points from the angelic racial template. (They are still Fragile, but the project is not completed yet.) Despite their name, they do have functioning legs.

. . . And Sinker: Giving Your GM Plot Hooks

by Carrie Schutrick

When creating a character, players often want to provide the GM with "plot hooks" -- that is, information about the PC that can be incorporated into an adventure or campaign. Unfortunately, many players, especially beginners, have little idea of how to do so in a useful manner; they create characters which are either nothing but lists of stats and (usually combat) skills ("What's your character like, Steve?" "Uh . . . he's got an 18 Strength.") , or burdened with elaborate and campy backstories, huge psychological problems, and silly, useless talents ("But it's essential to the concept that she be able to speak Basque!") This article is intended to help those who wish to pursue the happy medium.

"We See Here The Wild Plot Hook . . . "

For starters, let's define our terms. At its core, a plot hook is something about a character that the GM can use in plotting his adventure. Almost anything can be a hook, from a character's burning desire to avenge his father's murder to a love of cats. Even something as simple as a fear of the dark can set the wheels turning; basically, if it causes the GM to rub his hands together and mutter, "I can use that," it's a plot hook. Sometimes the player intentionally designs a hook into his character, as is the case with the Enemy (*GURPS*) and Hunted (*Champions*) disadvantages. Other hooks are accidental; the player probably had no idea that his character's sister wasn't really dead until he made that perception roll and the villain's voice struck him as familiar.

Your System and You

Some systems make it easier than others to incorporate plot hooks into the design of a character. *Dungeons and Dragons*, for example, encodes nothing about a character except his stats, skills, and spells if any. While this can be very freeing, it can also lead to characters with no distinguishing features at all. On the other hand, systems like *Champions* all but demand plot hooks as a basic part of character creation. This system can be useful in that it provides concrete benefits for working plot hooks (which are usually disadvantageous) into a character, but it can also lead to min-maxing and the infuriating search for "just one more disad". (There's also the *Over the Edge* paradigm, which is far more concerned with character concept than specific stats, but that's a little out of our scope here.)

If your group's system is of the *Dungeons & Dragons* type, adding plot hooks is actually surprisingly easy. Just declare that your character is afraid of the dark, or has a burning desire to avenge his father's murder, or loves cats, and get on with playing. You may wish to make a note of your hook(s), both for yourself and your GM, as a memory aid, but you need not bother with game mechanics.

Those whose system is of the second type will have to exert slightly more effort, especially if the game is already in progress and the characters established. Players creating new characters, of course, can just go through the lists that these systems provide and pick something that appeals to them; those with established characters should probably discuss changes with the GM.

One from Column A . . .

Plot hooks tend to fall into four broad categories: NPCs, Goals, Mental Problems, and Fate.

The **NPC**, or non-player character, plot hook comes in many varieties. For example, the character may have an old army buddy who occasionally comes along on adventures. When one day the buddy stops answering phone calls and the character decides to figure out why, that's a plot hook. Conversely, if the Dark Lord's lieutenant was responsible for the death of the PC's father, it's not a hook unless the character then begins plotting revenge.

Before taking an NPC-based plot hook, it's best to consider (and probably consult) the GM and the other players. If every PC in the group has a couple of enemies, a cute sidekick, a boss, and an evil twin, the GM will likely tire of tracking and playing them all fairly quickly. Also, many systems base the appearance of such NPCs on a die roll; if your GM prefers to stick strictly to such a system, either limit your NPC plot hooks or take them with low frequencies or both, lest the campaign degenerate into "Whose Enemy shows up *this* week?" Last but not least, if there is only one PC with associated NPCs in a party, he may get disproportionate amounts of the GM's time and energy; other players will likely resent this, and with good reason.

Goals are, as advertised, the PC's goals. There is always the old standby, "Avenge my father's/family's/village's/people's death," but less extreme goals can be just as meaningful and motivating. A character who wants nothing more than to save up enough money to buy his own ship is unlikely to pass up any money-making opportunity the GM waves before him -- even if the opportunity is, perhaps, a little shady. Again, players should be careful not to overburden the GM or overshadow other peoples' characters; a goal like "Aid the Rebellion any way I can" is much more playable than "Single-handedly destroy the Death Star."

Mental problems: phobias, obsessions, amnesia, you name it and there will be someone willing to inflict it on some poor defenseless PC.

(As a side note, it has been said that amnesia is "the ultimate plot hook." Don't give your character amnesia unless you *really want* to give the GM carte blanche to play around with him. There's nothing worse than the sinking feeling when the GM looks at you and says, with a slightly pitying expression, "You don't remember." This lesson comes from painful experience . . .)

A mental problem can be a powerful plot hook indeed. Countless superheroes have this sort of hook in their origin stories; the classic example is Batman. The death of his parents gave him an obsession with fighting crime, and the rest is history. (Note that had he only tried to hunt down the one criminal who killed his parents, that would have been an NPC-oriented plot hook.) The GM may also use a character's phobia in designing adversaries for the party; when the toughest fighter in the group refuses to help the party against Arachnia because he's afraid of spiders, the other players must find some way either to convince him or work around his absence.

When selecting Mental Problems as plot hooks, be sure you only take those you are willing to roleplay. It will frustrate your GM to no end if he provides tempting trinkets as targets for your PC's kleptomania, only to have the character ignore them. Likewise, if you can't stomach the idea of roleplaying sadism or racism, don't take those flaws.

Last but not least, there's **Fate**. This one takes an experienced GM and a player who's willing to be patient. Basically, the idea is that the hero has some destiny -- which he may or may not like when it arrives -- and the plot is built around helping him to achieve it. Done well, this need not be boring for the other members of the party, nor will it feel like the PCs are just pawns in the GM's plot. Done poorly, it can be stifling for the fated PC or lead the other players to feel that their characters are being ignored. Much like goals, a nonspecific fate like "The PC will die saving someone he loves" is probably more playable than "The PC will become king of Upper Fnordia the year he turns 33." Destinies should be fairly long-term, lest the PC built around his Fate suddenly find that, having achieved it, he has nothing to do.

If the Hook Fits, Wear It

When selecting plot hooks, it's probably wise to consult the GM about the "feel" of the campaign. A tragic plot hook won't fit into a lighthearted campaign, in much the same way that a combat-oriented character won't go well with a campaign that has a social focus. Similarly, be sure to check that the GM isn't planning a grim campaign before introducing your comedic sidekick Harvey the Wonder Hamster.

It's generally a good idea as well to check what kinds of plot hooks the GM thinks will be relevant. If the first adventure involves the PC leaving his home in search of adventure, it's not going to matter all that much that the mayor of his village hates him and would like to see him dead -- unless the mayor has the power or influence to send people to make sure he winds up that way.

The media (books, movies, TV, comics, and so on) can be plumbed for ideas, of course, and it's not necessary to be too concerned about genre when doing so; "I have to save the princess and avenge my father's murder" works just as well in space opera as it does in fantasy. Just make sure the tone fits.

Example: Bob the Human Fighter

Bob the Human Fighter usually isn't really named Bob, but anyone who's played an RPG has probably gamed with or even played him. Bob is the absolute minimum that the system will support -- and that can be pretty minimal in many of the classic rule systems out there. He's got all his basic stats, a list of skills, and what equipment he's carrying. Sometimes, in a fit of mad creativity, the player will provide a physical description.

What can we do for Bob?

Well, Bob's probably a reasonably strong, agile guy, though not necessarily very smart. What has led him to take up an adventuring life rather than staying quietly at home and becoming a blacksmith? There are many answers, and few of them require more than a few seconds' thought to come up with. Maybe Bob's best friend is set on joining the army, and has persuaded Bob to come along (an NPC). Perhaps Bob's father disappeared when he was a baby, and he wants to track him down and find out why (a Goal). Bob could have a very bad temper, so bad that no one in his home village will talk to him anymore; he's hit the road out of necessity rather than desire (a Mental Problem). Or maybe he's just been having these dreams where a beautiful woman asks him for his help, and promises that she'll help him to his destiny in return (Fate).

We could choose one of those and stop, content with having given Bob a little bit of a background (and hopefully a better name). But it's more fun to use all of them, like so: Bob has a bad temper, and most of the people in his home town don't like to deal with him. One of the few exceptions is another young man who convinces him that they should join the army. "It's a way of getting out of this stupid little town," he says, "And besides, wasn't your dad in the army before he left?" Bob agrees, and they set off. The first night on the road, however, his sleep is interrupted by vivid dreams of a beautiful woman who pleads for his help . . .

It took about 15 minutes for us to change Bob from a list of stats to something a GM could sink his teeth into. It's a decent mix of short- and long-term hooks, useful to the GM without being overwhelming.

However, it's all too easy to be overwhelming:

Well, OK, so his True Love was killed by a mysterious masked man and he's dedicated his life to tracking down her murderer, except he doesn't remember much about his life before she died, and he's got this orphan ward he adopted who he doesn't want to know about his crimefighting, oh and did I mention he was raised by a secret order of shapeshifting psychic ninjas?

The GM presented with this character background can only be pitied. There are two likely options: only one of his players has been so creative, and the others feel overshadowed; or they're *all* like this, in which case he has to sort through and remember all the many and varied hooks and somehow make them all work together.

The best solution to this sort of problem is for the GM and the player to sit down and work out what the player wants out of his character. In this particular case, it seems obvious that the player wants a Batman/Shadow feel: a Dark Avenger, someone who swoops out of the night to help those in need, with no desire for payment or thanks. He's motivated by a terrible event in his past, but tries to keep it separate from his day-to-day life, and perhaps he has access to some strange or exotic powers. How can we keep that feel intact while cutting down on the needless complications?

Let's say our character -- Robert, for ease of reference -- did indeed lose his True Love to a murder. The murderer was caught and put in jail, but the event left Robert scarred. He suffered a breakdown and to this day can't remember anything about the night it happened. When he recovered, he decided he needed to do his part to ensure such things

never happened to anyone else. He found an old man, master of the arts of the mind, and set himself to learning everything he could. The old man is physically frail and disapproves of violence, so Robert does his best to keep him from realizing that his protegee and the Dark Avenger are one and the same.

Hopefully, Robert's player will be happy with this version of his character; it maintains the concept while allowing the GM a little more wiggle room, and even providing him with a few future hooks he probably hasn't thought of. For example, what happens when the murderer, claiming to be rehabilitated, is released on parole . . . ?

In the end, it's all a matter of what works for you and your GM. If everyone's having fun with a party of Bob, Steve, and John the Fighters, Ed the Mage, Tim the Cleric, and Sam the Thief, run with it! It might be fun to try a little extra character background to see if you like it -- but you don't, you don't; you shouldn't feel constrained by anyone else's idea of Good Roleplaying™. Likewise, some groups may thrive on character backgrounds as convoluted as *X-Men* continuity, and more power to them.

The basic rules, then, are these: try to help the GM without overwhelming him. Don't thrust your character into the spotlight with no regard for other players. Don't put things into your character background that you won't be willing to deal with later. And above all, have fun!

And soon you may find yourself on a quest to find a former lover, who betrayed the whole party to the Powers of Darkness; you're pretty sure he's somewhere up north . . .

Pyramid Review

Gold Digger



From [Out of the Box Publishing, Inc.](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Design Team Mark Osterhaus and Ellen Osterhaus

Illustration and Graphic Design by John Kovalic

66 full-color cards; \$9.95

Considering its impressive track record of developing fast-playing games that are easy to learn but still demand a lot of the players' noggins, Out of the Box Publishing Inc. doesn't have far to go to strike gaming gold. As such, it may seem hopelessly redundant to name a game *Gold Digger*.

The object of the game is to be the player with claims in the most valuable mines. Everyone else will want to fight with you for the productive ones, or will try to fill those mines you claim with a lot of worthless fool's gold.

The game -- suitable for two to five players -- starts with six Mine Cards, each a different color. Each player gets three cards from the deck and three Claim Tokens (each player has a different color of Claim Token, but only so you can tell which claims are yours; there's no connection between your token color and the mine colors). On his turn, a player must play one of his cards. This can be a Character Card, a Gold Card, or a Fool's Gold Card. Like the mines, the Character Cards are color-coded, and must be played above the Mine Card of the same color; each mine has five characters of matching hue. If a player places one of these cards, he will have the option in the next step of staking a claim there (you cannot stake a claim on a mine unless you played a character there this same turn).

If you prefer, you can play a Gold or Fool's Gold Card; these go under the Mine Card of your choice. Each mine can only have five cards under it. The Gold Cards are worth from one to eight points (each card has little bags of gold to show how much it's worth), but a Fool's Gold card is worthless, and some of those will doubtless take up a few of those five precious slots.

After playing a card, a player may stake a claim. You may place a plastic Claim Token on a Mine Card if you played a Character Card there this turn. You don't have to place a claim; you could wait for a more valuable mine to start piling up bags of gold, or, if you think too many people will vie for the high-scoring spots, you may try to claim a smaller mine whose profits you don't have to share.

You have to be careful with your tokens; once spent, you cannot claim additional mines. Playing a token too early lets your opponents know which mine to fill with fool's gold. If you wait, though, you may not get to place all your Claim Tokens; there's no guarantee you'll get a matching Character Card on a mine with a decent output.

At the end of your turn, you draw back to three cards and play passes to the left. When the last of the 66 cards is on the table, the game ends and you rack up points. If you have the only Claim Token on a mine, all the points therein belong to you (assuming it's not brimming with fool's gold). If multiple players have placed a token there, the points are totaled and divided evenly among the claimants (fractions are discarded). So a mine with cards picturing five bags of gold is worth five to one claimant, two points each to two miners, and only one point to three, four, or five claimants. Add all your mine totals together, and the high score wins.

There's not much to dislike about a game like this. The colors are bright and vibrant, John Kovalic's cartoon pictures (each Character Card has a name, like Donna Partie or Mannin Black) are oh-so-delightful, and you can take in the whole layout in a glance. It can require a lot of calculation and forethought, but play still seems to be pretty fast with all but the most fastidious players. It's a tightly woven game, and there's plenty of noodle scratching as players try to balance out all the strategic considerations.

Like many Out of the Box products, the simple setup makes it feel like you're paying a good bit of money for not much product (it's the sort of product Cheapass Games may sell for half the price) but when the homestead is on the line, you're down to your last token, and your fortunes rest on grabbing that mother lode, somehow such factors fade into the background. ***Gold Digger*** hits a rich vein of fun.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

The Resurrected III: Out of the Vault (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Pagan Publishing](#)

Written by John H. Crowe III, Steve Hatherley, J. Todd Kingrea, Christian Klepac, Jeff Moeller, John Tynes and Kevin A. Ross

Illustrated by Toren Atkinson, Jane Brooks, Heather Hudson and Blair Reynolds

164-page perfectbound b&w book; \$24.95

The arrival of a new supplement from Pagan Publishing for *Call of Cthulhu* on the gaming shelf is always something of a treat. The game itself continues to be a firm favorite, with an excellent range of supplements and campaign books -- none more so than those from Pagan Publishing. Its approach to the Mythos invariably gives the resulting scenarios and campaigns a darker, more distinctive edge that has only been equalled in Chaosium's most recent releases, such as the award winning [Unseen Masters](#).

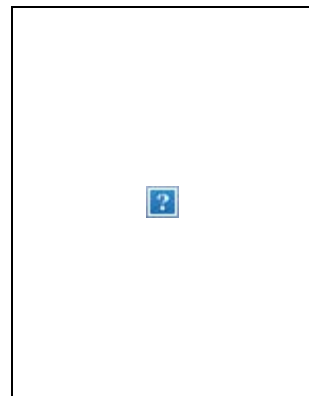
The latest from Pagan is not really all that new at all. *The Resurrected III: Out of the Vault* is an anthology that collects and reprints 10 scenarios previously seen in the first 10 issues Pagan's magazine, *The Unspeakable Oath*. As the title suggests, this is the third volume in an occasional series. The first -- *The Resurrected, Volume One: Grace Under Pressure*, contained just a single one-shot adventure with live action elements set aboard a submersible that comes too close to R'lyeh. Its sequel -- *The Resurrected Volume Two: Of Keys and Gates*, contained three more scenarios taken from issues one and three of *The Unspeakable Oath*. Those three -- "Within You Without You," "The Travesty," and "The House on Stratford Lane" also appear in this new volume.

In terms of production values and graphic design, each of Pagan Publishing's books is a pleasure to look at. This is certainly true of *The Resurrected III: Out of the Vault*, which continues the trend of employing a lighter tone and touch previously seen in [The Unspeakable Oath 16/17](#) and thus away from the dark oppressive feel of [Mortal Coils](#), [The Realm of Shadows](#), and [The Unspeakable Oath 14/15](#). The book also contains new art throughout, and *The Resurrected III: Out of the Vault* has been illustrated with some wonderfully disturbing pieces. In addition, all of the maps and handouts have been reworked from the original appearance of each scenario. A nice touch is that the beginning of each scenario is marked with a box telling you where the adventure first appeared along with a comment or two about its history. Most of the adventures are set during the 20s, with just a couple set in the present day; those taking place in the 20s can just as easily be adjusted for use in the 1890s of Cthulhu by Gaslight.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The book opens with "Within You Without You" by John Tynes, from *The Unspeakable Oath #1*. A letter leads the investigators to the Massachusetts village of Solace and a strange encounter with its shadow. A centuries old ritual to extend a cult leader's life comes back to haunt both villagers and investigators as Solace becomes snowbound. This is intended for reasonably experienced players and the Keeper will need to read thoroughly the three endings given.

Christian Klepac's "The Travesty" follows "Within You Without You" and again takes place within an enclosed environment, a Wisconsin set hotel owned by an old friend and beset by what turns out to be a native Indian "Guardian



Spirit." Unfortunately it is actually more than that, and it is this creature that creates the enclosed environment. This allows for interesting atmosphere to build, especially helped by the nicely done NPC descriptions and suggestions for their use in the text.

When a young girl goes missing, the investigators are asked to look into the life and habits of one of her neighbors, Charles Edwards, in "The House on Stratford Lane" by John H. Crowe III from issue three. The reclusive physics graduate of Miskatonic University keeps all hours and receives deliveries at all times of the day. The police may not think him a suspect, but those that live nearby are not so sure. What makes this scenario interesting is that the fact that there is every good reason to investigate Edwards, but it has nothing to do with the girl's disappearance.

The "Beast in the Abbey" by Kevin A. Ross is the first of two adventures first seen in issue five and set in the United Kingdom. The investigators receive a set of newspaper articles about a spate of strange deaths and a photograph depicting a man terrorized by a possible ghost along with a letter requesting their aid in a village on the English northeast coast. A ghost is involved, but only as a result of the real threat, which was first put to rest back during the early days of British Christianity. In terms of *Call of Cthulhu*, it has a very traditional feel in terms of its introduction and evokes a nicely English atmosphere a la *Green and Pleasant Land*. The second of the UK-set scenarios is Steve Hatherley's "The Lambton Worm," which was also published in *Pyramid* and could easily be run as a sequel to "Beast in the Abbey." It is rather leisurely affair that draws upon local folklore, but of course giving a Mythos rationale behind its setting's secrets. Both of these adventures are relatively simple and easy to run in the 1890s.

Although they have appeared in the rulebooks for years, it is questionable whether or not the vampire sits so well in *Call of Cthulhu*. They always seem at odds with the Mythos, but seem to work well enough in J. Todd Kingrea's "Blood on the Tracks" taken from issue six. This is set on train journey that happens to have one or two very hungry passengers aboard.

Not every scenario gives the investigators the opportunity to face down and hopefully end the efforts of a fully working cult, but "Dark Harvest" by Kevin A. Ross certainly does. First appearing in issue eight/nine, this along with "What Goes Around, Comes Around," is the longest scenario in the book. Originally written to accompany background material on the "Randolph Pierce Foundation" -- a private investigative organization, "Dark Harvest" is divorced from this to stand-alone. It details a Shub-Niggurath worshipping cult in Iowa about to bring to fruition a major plan, which with some effort can be stopped by the players. There are some parallels between it and the scenario "Blessed Be" by Gary Sumpter, which appears in from Chaosium's *Ramsey Campbell's Goatswood and less pleasant places*. Both are very deadly scenarios, though there is a greater chance of the characters surviving "Dark Harvest."

Although there is a mystery in Jeff Moeller's "What Goes Around, Comes Around" from issue eight/nine, there are no cultists to face . . . just the consequences of their actions. When it appears that the police have no intention of investigating the murder of his wife, Robert McCorkindale hires the characters to look into the matter. The main difficulty they face is the weird obstinacy of the investigating police officer, which will probably make an interesting change to facing something unnameable. The adventure benefits from some gruesome art and a loose thread or two that can be woven into future scenarios.

The first of the book's modern scenarios is "All Good Children" by Christian Klepac from issue ten. *Call of Cthulhu* abounds with dangerous tomes and journals, but here the danger comes through a book written and painted by a local children's author. This has quite a dreamlike quality to it, though it does not directly involve the Dreamlands.

The anthology is rounded off with John Tynes' "In Media Res," a dark modern set one-shot scenario with live action elements and designed for four players only. As the title suggests, this drops the players into the middle of things, literally with no memories of either who they are or how they came to standing around a dining room table over the tied down body of a guard, who has had his throat cut and is missing both tongue and face! Playable in just a single session, events will quickly escalate, forcing the unstable quartet to recover from their amnesia and learn a little more about their situation. It has no real definite ending in the classic *Call of Cthulhu* sense, but works all the better for it. This should be an interesting roleplaying experience for all concerned, especially if run with live action elements in your own home. First seen in issue ten, it is accompanied by the live action playtest report that appeared in number eleven.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Of course, if you happen to own the first ten issues of *The Unspeakable Oath*, there is no real reason to want this book on your shelf, and if you own *The Resurrected Volume Two: Of Keys and Gates*, which contains three of the scenarios here, you may also be put off from buying this sequel. Even so, *The Resurrected III: Out of the Vault* enables you to revisit these scenarios in a pleasingly revised format, along with better illustrations, maps, and handouts. It is also handy to have them in one easy to use package. Despite already having eight of these scenarios in this book, I am more likely to use its contents rather than flip through several issues of *The Unspeakable Oath*. Of course, if you have none of the ten issues, *The Resurrected III: Out of the Vault* gives you another ten excellent scenarios, eight of which are suited to a 20s game and all ten of which can be played in a single evening. Although this latest release from Pagan Publishing may not contain any new material, *The Resurrected III: Out of the Vault* is not only well presented, but is also a worthy addition to the *Call of Cthulhu* fold.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

The Moonstruck (for Hunter: the Reckoning)

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

Written by Matt McFarland, Ethan Skemp, & Adam Tinworth

109 pages; \$17.95

Q: What do you get when you cross an Imbued Hunter named Charles with a Werewolf?

A: Ground Chuck.

The Moonstruck is the third Enemy book released for *Hunter*. The first two -- *The Walking Dead* and *Nocturnal* -- dealt with two of *Hunter*'s most obvious enemies, the walking dead (duh) and vampires. *Moonstruck* deals with werewolves. It mentions other shape shifters in passing, but the majority of the book is spent detailing hunters and their investigations into/encounters with werewolves.

The book, like most recent *Hunter* books, eschews the online BBS format that in-character content in the sourcebooks used to be composed of. Instead, that info in this book is composed of three stories, each in two parts detailing a hunter's encounters with werewolves, and an introductory tale. The stories are, thankfully, readable. The introductory one details a ghost town trip that goes horribly wrong. The second one details a plane crash that, once again, goes horribly wrong. The third one details a meeting between a group of hunters and some Werewolves that goes horribly wrong.

The last one is the story of a hunter and her therapist and their interaction with a group of humans affiliated with werewolves. It ends happily, with the two groups agreeing to work together to make the world a better place.

Ah, who are we kidding? It goes horribly wrong.

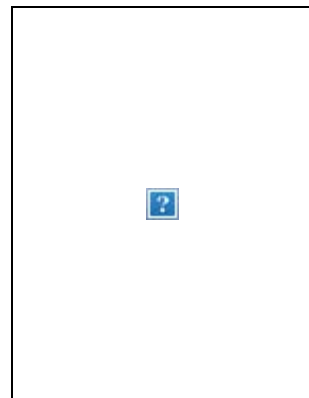
Fans of both games will probably agree that the second story works the best; it reads as a sort of Blair-Witch-as-written-by-Agatha-Christie story. The story progresses as the viewpoint character tries to figure out which of his companions is a feral marauder. The best part is that every so often the author will state a factoid about one of the characters that will make Werewolf fans go, "Aha! Surely *he/she* is the werewolf, and will soon show their true face!"

More often than not, *he/she* ends up dead in the next scene.

Story three tells of a group of British hunters and their encounters with werewolves. It has the advantage of using some of the hunter signature characters, including Six of Swords and Kristy the Wayward. It evolves as the classic Super Team fight; two "teams" meet, there's a misunderstanding, someone is too trigger happy, and suddenly mayhem ensues. It has a good example of how Hunters might come into contact with werewolves. The initial progress of the investigation has some rather strong intuitive leaps, but it seems reasonable that hunters can have some powerful intuition when they need it.

The fourth story has a good twist to it, using an old nemesis from *Werewolf*'s first edition. Unfortunately, if you aren't a *Werewolf* fan from way back, it won't make much sense, and the book doesn't give any info on that particular aspect of the *Werewolf* mythos.

The book concludes with an expansion to the rules regarding werewolves and shape changers, giving *Hunter* rules for



werecats/rats/spiders/crows/sharks. It expands on the info presented in the *Storyteller's Companion* for *Hunter*. There's no new werewolf "spells," but the rituals of the werewolves are now incorporated into the game.

The books' theme seems to be, primarily, that two groups that are the "good guys" can still end up in conflict when they meet. It answers the question, "Wouldn't it be great if the werewolves and the hunters got together and kicked butt on evil?" Unfortunately, the answer is, "Yes, it would, but if you think it would be that easy you haven't been paying attention."

The biggest improvement in the book might have been to include some kind of guidance on setting up a not-quite-so-adversarial relationship between the two groups, at least by allowing them to have some short term gains before it all goes horribly wrong.

Although fans of the BBS posting style of the early Hunter sourcebooks may be disappointed, the short story format of this book seems to work. The BBS format allowed for a wider breadth of information to be presented, while the stories let the writers focus, at the expense some of the side info.

Artwise, the book is acceptable. The cover by Steve Ellis is a nice illustration of the werewolf antagonists of the book (the transparent wolf's head is striking), but why are the central character's nipples as red as his sunglasses? Interior-art wise, it's always wonderful to see art by Ron Spencer, particularly in a *Werewolf*-related book, but Guy Davis' art lacks the strength it had in the *Wraith* books.

The book contains as much detail on werewolves as a *Hunter* storyteller will need. There is obviously room for more detail, but at a certain point it becomes extra stuff the storyteller doesn't really need. If you have both games, then it's extraneous and useful only for atmosphere, but for those who want more detail on werewolves and other shifters, it's a useful resource.

--Justin Mohareb

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Not Giving Subgenres Das Boot (Part I)

I was reading over the *Shadowforce Archer* book earlier this week, when I realized that one of the reasons I like the setting is the same reason I respected *Vampire* when it came out.

See, *Vampire* had the unenviable task of taking something that everyone has preconceived notions of -- um, vampires -- and trying to weave those ideas into a cohesive whole, while still making sense. This allowed for an amazingly inclusive game. Is your idea of vampires hideous bestial creatures that commune with animals? There's a clan that's just like that. Do you think vampires are Lestat-esque fops? No problem. Do you think vampires don't appear in mirrors? Well, you're partly right. In short, any prospective player could wrap his mind around some aspect of the game, *and* the GM had the ability to draw upon practically any aspect of the vampiric myth to craft a story.

Of course, this technique had been seen in gaming before. Most notable is the venerable *Forgotten Realms* setting, where practically any aspect of history from, say, 500 AD through 1600 AD -- *and* any fantastic manifestations of that aspect -- can be represented in some way. Vikings, courtly intrigue, flying carpets, new world exploration . . . it's all in there. And, of course, we've seen similar subgenres in *7th Sea* and *Fading Suns*, among others.

And now I'm looking over *Shadowforce Archer*, and realizing that they, too, have followed this inclusive formula, creating logical pockets for a myriad of different spy-related genres. From gritty mafia-esque intrigues to martini-sipping Bond-type adventures, from ninjas to special ops, it's possible to take almost any type of possible "spy" story and fit it into the game world, where it will (more or less) make sense.

So, if lots of successful gaming lines have used the inclusive technique to bring folks into the fold, why can't you?

(*Answer*: No reason. It was rhetorical anyway . . . come along!)

First: What are you doing?

Figure out what stories, exactly, you're trying to tell. This can be a pretty wide swath, but *too* wide ("any genre, any time, any place, ever") can be problematic to contain. So let's make up an example on the fly: we want to create a superhero campaign world, where many different kinds of superhero stories are possible.

Second: What specific types of story do you want to be possible?

This will probably be subgenres of the main genre, but can include other possibilities. For our superhero example, let's look at the various kinds of superhero books:

- four-color high-power
- gritty mock realistic
- magical heroes
- technological heroes
- martial artist action-hero type
- 1950s and 1960s optimistic
- modern self-referential "normal" game

There are surely a jillion other subgenres that we could include, but for the purpose of our column (didja ever notice how it suddenly becomes *our* column when *I'm* floundering?), this is plenty.

Third: How inter-mingled do we want these genres?

We're going to decide that each genre is going to be roughly separate, but still allow for some interaction. On the one

hand, what's the point of having all these different subgenres if they can't interact? On the other, if it's too easy for them to intermingle, then what's the point of trying to keep them apart? (For that matter, what keeps the four-color heroes from completely overshadowing their gritty mock realistic counterparts?)

Third-and-a-halfth: Do we have any good hooks?

At this point, we may ask ourselves, "Do we have any good 'hooks' that we want to tie into the background?" (Of course, we may have started this process with a great hook that we're just now getting around to codifying. This step is also pretty optional, which is another reason it gets a "half" step rating.)

Well, as a matter of fact, we *do* have a good hook to tie in here. It comes from the observation that superheroes tend to have "home" cities, whence they do not stray. ("Superlativelad! Californina's on fire!" "Yeah . . . that's really not going to work for me, I'm afraid; see, I have this cooking show thing going on downtown . . .") Even more absurd, the villains that get trounced by these heroes *also* tend to stick around the same city. ("Dude! Why don't I buy a bus ticket for one city over? There aren't *any* heroes there!") So, why might this be? Well, perhaps because the energies that power these individuals are geographically limited. Stray too far from Mahtog Township and you'll find that you're soon no more powerful than your average Starbucks employee.

Realizing what we said a mere half-step ago about wanting to keep the different genres interactive but separate, we decide that any drain from leaving one's geographical location is relatively slow; we don't want X-Plative to smash into the side of a building because he tried to stray into the realm of the magical heroes.

Four: Divvy up what needs divvying up.

However you've decided to parcel out your subgenres, now's the time to figure out where each one goes. This can be geographically, temporally (if, say, each subgenre is more powerful or prominent at certain times of year), it can involve spheres of influence, or whatever else is important in the game world. If the game is based on the real world, this is pretty straightforward; simply look at a world map (or a Fairly Complete List of Appropriate Stuff, for non-geographical concerns) and rationalize out your decisions. For completely fabricated worlds, you'll need to consider your choices pretty carefully: What happens when you put the High Magic Fae Kingdom *right* next to Vikings, Incorporated?

Let's look again at our list:

- **four-color high-power** -- We realize the most powerful heroes will come from here, so we decide to keep this region small. Recognizing the importance of The City to this genre, we decide to give them a city . . . and *only* a city. Throwing a dart at a map, we decide on Seattle. It's a big and interesting enough city that it's worth defending, but out of the way enough that geographical limitations will keep heroes (and villains) from leaving too often.
- **gritty mock realistic** -- This one can be a larger area, since this will probably be the weakest of the genres we cover. We decide to go with much of the east coast, and especially New England. This gives a large number of potential gritty urban adventures, and keeps it a long ways away from the four-color area, creating that Metropolis/Gotham division the kids seem to like.
- **magical heroes** -- We succumb to the obvious temptations and choose a good chunk of England for our heroes (and threats) with eldritch ties to hail from. This one may prove most difficult, since magic is tough to codify (especially given the source material of comic books), and giving them a large area means we'll need to sort out those ramifications.
- **technological heroes** -- Ahh . . . powered armor, giant robots, gadgets. Two tickets for Japan, please -- Mothra-free flight, if possible.
- **martial artist action-hero type** -- Well, Japan is already taken for this one, so we need to find someplace else to target. Fond memories of Jackie Chan films fill our minds as we settle on Australia and New Zealand.
- **1950s and 1960s optimistic** -- This is an odd genre to include, which is why we're doing it. In a nod to the Midwestern values that gave rise to Superman, we decide on a fairly large-ish region encompassing much of

Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois. Again, we'll need to be careful on how we define this region; we don't want Chicago to be shrunk into a bottle city *every* week, after all.

- **modern self-referential "normal" game** -- This is the region of many popular comics like *Powers*, *Alias* (yeah, both written by the same guy . . . so what?), and -- to a lesser extent -- *Astro City*. Superheroes serve as continual window-dressing, but for the most part stories revolve around human concerns and challenges. Here we are looking for another interesting urban setting, with potential for low-powered superheroic action, as necessary. We settle on the Denver area, with a region encompassing Boulder, Colorado Springs, and possibly Pueblo.

Next week we'll look at creating rules that help reinforce (but not necessarily restrict) the genres we establish, and also how to put it all together into a "real" campaign world (or, at least, how to bring it to a stage where a more "normal" campaign world might end up). If you didn't like this week's installment, next week's won't fail to disappoint.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: Cute & Fuzzy [Cockfighting] Seizure Monsters, p. 31.

(*One star*) "On a holodeck, the stakes are too low to foster interesting drama. Who cares if bad things happen? Any negative result can be erased with a single voice command to the computer. Mistakes can be unmade, deaths reversed."

Designer's Notes: *GURPS Modern Firepower*

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

"Anything else?"

"Phased-plasma rifle in the 40-watt range."

"Hey, just what you see, pal."

-- Alamo Gun Clerk and T-800 in *Terminator*

I have published articles on modern (as well as antique and futuristic) armaments for use with *GURPS* for some years now -- first in my fanzine, aptly-titled *The Armourer*, then on GURPSnet, and finally in *Pyramid*. At the same time, I pestered Dr. Kromm, David Pulver, various authors in playtest, and several errata coordinators with errata lists and assorted essays and comments on obscure stuff they probably could not care less about. Then, in early summer of 2001, David finally had enough and suggested I should write my own book. It sounded like a good idea.

While writing the book, I found that I had not even half enough space for all the items I wanted to cover. Consequently, a *small* portion of the stuff that did not make it follows in this article. Of course, there might always be a *GURPS Modern Firepower 2* for the rest of it . . .

Modern Squad-level Firepower

The following overviews detail the *typical* combat equipment of a number of military forces in the year 2002, to put some of the armaments described in *GURPS Modern Firepower* into perspective (and hopefully help with the odd campaign, for example to describe a "normal" opposing forces squad for *GURPS Special Ops*). Note that the entries below refer to above-average front-line units equipped with the most modern weaponry -- smaller or larger parts of the various nations' military forces usually remain armed with older and less sophisticated weapons. Also, the loadouts are for full-scale combat operations -- squads deployed for guard duty or police operations will be armed differently.

Since many of the small arms adopted in the 1990s will see service well into the 2010s, these lists can also be used to extrapolate into the future. However, major conflicts -- which accelerate the fielding of new weapon designs -- may change this considerably.

The rifle squad (called a section in Great Britain and those forces patterned after her military) is the smallest unit, and has between 5-15 men. Two to four rifle squads (but normally three) and the headquarter's squad make up a platoon, typically bolstered by support weapons which are either part of the HQ squad or a dedicated weapons squad. Usually the squad leader is a mid-ranking (Rank 1) non-commissioned officer such as a sergeant or staff sergeant. Often the squad can be further divided into smaller tactical elements (fire teams), which are led by Rank 0 NCOs such as a corporal. Again, British and Commonwealth units differ: they have a corporal as section leader, and a lance corporal as his second-in-command (both Rank 0 in *GURPS*).

Body armor and helmets are standard issue, see Chapter 4 in *GURPS Modern Firepower*. Ammunition and equipment is carried in load-bearing equipment or vests (see *Special Ops, Second Edition*, p. 95).

Australia

An Australian Army infantry section (9 men) consists of a section leader, machine gunner, SAW gunner, grenadier, and five riflemen. The section leader and the riflemen each have an ADI F88SA1 AUSTEYR assault rifle (licensed Steyr AUG, pp. B209, HT115) with ELCAN 3.4X scope (p. MF13) and seven magazines, two ADI F1 hand grenades (below), knife/bayonet (below), and often also an AN-M8 smoke grenade (pp. B209, HT117, and W98) and ADI L1A2-F1 LAW (licensed M72A2, p. HT122). The machine gunner has an Enfield L7A2 machine gun (licensed FN MAG, p. HT120) with three 100-round belts. The SAW gunner has an ADI F89A1 (licensed FN MINIMI, pp. HT120,

TM80) with 1.5X scope and five 100-round belts. Additional ammo for both the machine gun and the SAW will be distributed among the riflemen. The grenadier has a rifle and R/M M203PI grenade launcher (pp. BO112, HT121) with twelve grenades. Often one or more of the riflemen also carry a Colt M79 grenade launcher (pp. BO112, HT121) with twelve grenades for additional firepower.

Platoon-level weapons include the FN-Browning L9A1 High-Power pistol (pp. B208, HT108, and W94), Accuracy International F98 sniper rifle (AW, p. MF24), and FFV L14A1 recoilless rifle (M2 Carl Gustaf, p. HT122).

Canada

A Canadian Army infantry section (8 men) consists of a section leader, two SAW gunners, two grenadiers, and three riflemen. The section leader and the riflemen each have a Diemaco C7A1 assault rifle (licensed Colt M16A2, p. MF17) with C79 ELCAN 3.4X scope (p. MF13) and seven magazines, two SNC C13 hand grenades (licensed M67, p. B209), knife/bayonet (below), and often also an AN-M8 smoke grenade (pp. B209, HT117, and W98) and Raufoss M72A5 LAW (p. HT122). The SAW gunners have a Diemaco C9A1 (licensed FN MINIMI, pp. HT120, TM80) with C79 ELCAN 3.4X scope and three 200-round belts. Additional ammo for the SAWs will be distributed among the riflemen. The grenadiers have a rifle and Diemaco M203A1 grenade launcher (licensed from Colt, p. HT121) with twelve grenades.

Platoon-level weapons include the Inglis-Browning No 2 Mk I* High-Power pistol (licensed from FN, pp. B208, HT108, and W94), FN C6 machine gun (MAG, p. HT120), Turnbull M19 60mm mortar (licensed from the U.S.; use stats of M2, p. HT120), FFV L14A1 recoilless rifle (M2 Carl Gustaf, p. HT122), and Aérospatiale ACCP Eryx ATGM.

China

A Chinese airborne infantry squad (11 men) consists of a squad leader, two team leaders, radio operator, two SAW gunners, two grenadiers, and three riflemen. The squad leader and the riflemen are armed with a NORINCO 95 Shi rifle (p. MF25) with six magazines, two NORINCO 86 Shi hand grenades (below), and a knife/bayonet (an *average* copy of the M9, below). The team leaders have a 3X scope on their rifle. Two riflemen also carry a NORINCO 89 Shi LAW (below). The radio operator has a NORINCO 95 Shi assault carbine (p. MF25). The SAW gunners have a NORINCO 95 Shi (p. MF25) with three 75-round drum magazines. The grenadiers are armed with a rifle and a NORINCO 95 Shi grenade launcher (copied Colt M203, pp. BO112, HT121) with ten grenades.

Platoon-level weapons include the NORINCO 92 Shi pistol (stats below), NORINCO 79 Shi sniper rifle (copied SVD, *Special Ops, Second Edition*, p. 100), and NORINCO 80 Shi machine gun (copied PK, p. HT120).

France

A French infantry squad (9 men) consists of a squad leader, a sniper, a SAW gunner, a grenadier, and five riflemen. The squad leader and the riflemen each have a GIAT FA-MAS-5.56-F1 assault rifle (*Special Ops, Second Edition*, pp. 100-101), seven magazines, two GIAT GR-AP/AV-40-F1 rifle grenades (below), two Luchaire GR-MA-DF-F1 hand grenades (stats below), and a knife/bayonet (below). Two will also carry a Bofors ABL-84-F1 LAW (AT4CS, *Special Ops, Second Edition*, p. 103). The sniper has a GIAT FR-F2 sniper rifle (stats below) with five magazines. The SAW gunner has a FN MINIMI-Para (compare p. HT120, stats below) with retractable stock and three 200-round belts. Additional ammo for the SAW will be distributed among the riflemen. The grenadier has either a rifle and Titanite LGI-52-F1 52mm mortar (licensed PRB FLY-K, p. HT121) with three shells, or a rifle and R/M M203PI grenade launcher (pp. BO112, HT121) with twelve grenades.

Platoon-level weapons include the GIAT PA-MAS-G1 pistol (licensed Beretta Mod 92G, pp. B208, C63, and HT108) and Aérospatiale ACCP Eryx ATGM.

Germany

A German *Fallschirmjäger* or *Gebirgsjäger* squad (10 men) consists of a squad leader, machine gunner, anti-tank specialist, grenadier, and six riflemen. The squad leader and the riflemen each have a H&K G36 assault rifle (pp. MF25-26) with five magazines, two Diehl DM51 hand grenades (p. MF32), 6Kh4 knife/bayonet (below), and often also a Piepenbrock DM25 smoke grenade (use AN-M8, pp. B209, HT117, and W98). The squad leader also has a H&K P2A1 flare pistol (*High-Tech, Second Edition*, p. 124) with eight flares. One or more riflemen have three Buck HAFLA DM34 incendiary launchers (pp. BO113, HT121). The machine gunner has a Rheinmetall MG3 machine gun (below) with three 120-round belts and a H&K P8 pistol (9×19mm variant of USP, p. HT109) with two magazines. Additional ammo for the machine gun will be distributed among the riflemen. The anti-tank specialist has a rifle and a Dynamit Nobel PZF3 rocket launcher (p. MF33) with one reload. More PZF3s may be allocated as needed. The grenadier has a rifle, and either a H&K AG1A1 grenade launcher (HK69A1 Granatpistole, p. HT121) or H&K AG36 underbarrel grenade launcher (p. MF31) with twelve grenades. From 2004, each squad will have three grenadiers with the AG36.

Platoon-level weapons include the Accuracy International G22 sniper rifle (p. MF24), Diehl sPZB2A1 recoilless rifle (licensed FFV M2 Carl Gustaf, p. HT122, fires only illumination rounds), and Euromissile MILAN 3 ATGM (p. HT122).

Great Britain

A British para infantry or Royal Marine section (8 men) consists of a section leader, two LMG gunners, two LSW gunners, two grenadiers, and one rifleman. Section leader and rifleman each have an H&K L85A2 Individual Weapon (improved Enfield L85A1, p. HT115) with L9A1 SUSAT 4X scope and four magazines, a SM L109A1 hand grenade (p. MF32), a Buck L84A1 hot smoke grenade (use AN-M8, pp. B209, HT117, and W98), and a knife/bayonet (below). They may also carry a Hunting L1A4 LAW (below). The LMG gunners have a FN L110A1 light machine gun (MINIMI-Para, compare p. HT120, stats below) with retractable stock and three 200-round belts. The LSW gunners have an H&K L86A2 Light Support Weapon (below) with twelve magazines (often half of these are carried by the riflemen for a more equally distributed load). The grenadiers have a rifle with an H&K L117A2 underbarrel grenade launcher (AG36, p. MF31) with twelve grenades.

Platoon-level weapons include the Enfield L7A2 machine gun (licensed FN MAG, p. HT120) and Royal Ordnance L10A1 51mm mortar (p. HT121).

India

An Indian infantry section (11 men) consists of section leader, two SAW gunners, anti-tank specialist, and seven riflemen. The section leader and riflemen are armed with either an Ishapore INSAS AR assault rifle (below) or a ROMARM Mod 80 assault rifle (Romanian AKM variant, pp. B209, HT114-115) with five magazines, two Khadki No. 36M hand grenades (pp. B209, HT117, and W98), and a knife/bayonet (below). The SAW gunners have either a Kanpur INSAS LMG (below) or a Ishapore 1B LMG (license-made BREN in 7.62×51mm, compare pp. HT119, W96, stats below) with five magazines. The anti-tank specialist has a rifle and an Ishapore 1A recoilless rifle (licensed FFV M2 Carl Gustaf, p. HT122) with five rounds. Four more are carried by one of the riflemen.

Platoon-level weapons include the Kanpur 1A pistol (license-made FN-Browning High-Power, pp. B209, HT108, and W94), Ishapore 2A1 machine gun (licensed FN MAG, p. HT120), and Kanpur E1 51mm mortar (pp. HT121, W98).

Iraq

An Iraqi Republican Guard infantry section (10 men) consists of a section leader, two SAW gunners, anti-tank specialist, and six riflemen. The section leader and the riflemen are armed with a Tabuk rifle (copied AKM, pp. B209, HT114-115) with seven magazines, two F-1 hand grenades (p. W98), and a knife/bayonet (below). The SAW gunners have an Al-Quds automatic rifle (copied RPK, pp. HT114-115) with five magazines. The anti-tank specialist has a Tariq pistol (copied Beretta Mod 951 Brigadier, stats below) and an Al-Nassira rocket launcher (copied RPG-7, pp. HT122, MF33) with five rounds. Four more rockets are carried by one of the riflemen.

Platoon-level weapons include the Al-Kadisa sniper rifle (copied SVD, *Special Ops, Second Edition*, p. 100), PKM machine gun (p. HT121), and Al-Jaleel 60mm mortar (use M2, pp. HT121, W98).

Israel

An Israeli infantry squad (9 men) consists of squad leader, SAW gunner, anti-tank specialist, grenadier, and five riflemen. The squad leader and riflemen each have a Colt CAR-15A1 R653 assault carbine (p. HT115) or IMI Galil AR assault rifle (p. HT115) with Elbit reflex sight (p. MF13) and seven magazines, two IMI M26A2 hand grenades (p. HT117) and a knife/bayonet (below), plus often an IMI No. 5 smoke grenade (use AN-M8, pp. B209, HT117, and W98), and IMI M72A3 LAW (p. HT122). The SAW gunner has an IMI Negev (below) with four 150-round belts. Additional ammo for the SAW will be distributed among the riflemen. The anti-tank specialist has a carbine and a Kovrov RPG-7V rocket launcher (pp. HT122, MF33) with nine rounds, eight more are carried by one of the riflemen. The grenadier has a carbine and a R/M M203PI grenade launcher (pp. BO112, HT121) with eighteen grenades.

Platoon-level weapons include the IMI MAG machine gun (licensed from FN, p. HT120) and IMI 52mm mortar (p. HT121).

The Colt CAR-15A1 R653 and IMI Galil ARM are being replaced by the IMI Tavor 2 assault carbine (below).

Mexico

A Mexican infantry squad (10 men) consists of squad leader, machine gunner, grenadier, anti-tank specialist, and six riflemen. The squad leader is armed with a DIM MP5A3 submachine gun (licensed from H&K, pp. B209, C64, HT116, and *Special Ops, Second Edition*, pp. 105-106) with five magazines. The riflemen are armed with a DIM G3A3 assault rifle (licensed from H&K, pp. B209, HT115) with five magazines, two M67 hand grenades (p. B209) and a knife/bayonet (below). Some may also carry a Talley M72A3 LAW (p. HT122). The machine gunner has a DIM HK21A1 machine gun (licensed from H&K, p. HT120) with three 100-round belts and a DIM P7M13S pistol (licensed from H&K, compare p. HT109, stats below) with two magazines. Additional ammo for the machine gun will be distributed among the riflemen. The grenadier has a Mechem MGL-6 grenade launcher (p. HT121) with eighteen grenades and a pistol. The anti-tank specialist has a rifle and an IMI B-300 rocket launcher (below) with three rounds.

Platoon-level weapons include the Watervliet M2 60mm mortar (pp. HT121, W98).

Pakistan

A Pakistani infantry section (11 men) consists of section leader, machine gunner, anti-tank specialist, and eight riflemen. The section leader has a POF MP5A2 submachine gun (licensed from H&K, pp. B209, C64, and *Special Ops, Second Edition*, pp. 105-106) with five magazines. The riflemen are armed with either a NORINCO Type 56 assault rifle (Chinese AKM variant, pp. B209, HT114-115) with seven magazines or a POF G3A3 assault rifle (licensed from H&K, pp. B209, HT115) with five magazines, two POF HG84P2A1 hand grenades (licensed ARGES HG84, stats below), and a knife/bayonet (below). The machine gunner has a POF MG3P (below) with three 100-round belts and a Walther P1 pistol (a modernized variant of the P38; see p. W94 and "[Secret Weapons](#)," stats below) with two magazines. Additional ammo for the machine gun will be distributed among the riflemen. The anti-tank specialist has a rifle and a MTF RPG-7 rocket launcher (licensed from Russia, pp. HT122, MF33) with five rounds. Four more rockets are carried by one of the riflemen.

Platoon-level weapons include the MTF Type 63 60mm mortar (modified copy of the NORINCO 63-1 Shi, itself a copy of the Watervliet M2, pp. HT121, W98).

Russia

A Russian motorized infantry squad (10 men) consists of squad leader, two machine gunners, two SAW gunners, two

grenadiers, anti-tank specialist, and two riflemen. The squad leader and riflemen are armed with an Izhmash AK-74 assault rifle (pp. HT114-115, *Special Ops, Second Edition*, p. 100) with four magazines, two Bazalt RGN-86 hand grenades (p. MF32), and a 6Kh4 knife/bayonet (below). The machine gunners have a Kovrov PKM machine gun (p. HT120) with three 100-round belts. The SAW gunners have a Molot RPK-74 (pp. HT114-115 and *Special Ops, Second Edition*, p.103) with four magazines. The anti-tank specialist has a rifle and a Kovrov RPG-7V rocket launcher (pp. HT122, MF33) with five rounds. Four more rockets are carried by one of the riflemen. The grenadiers have a rifle and a KBP GP-30 grenade launcher (p. MF31) with ten grenades. Some units also issue LAWs like the Bazalt RPG-27 (p. MF33).

Platoon-level weapons include the Izhmekh PM Makarov pistol (p. C63 and *Special Ops, Second Edition*, p. 98) and Izhmash SVD sniper rifle (*Special Ops, Second Edition*, p. 100).

The Izhmash AN-94 rifle (p. MF27), TsNIITochMash Pecheneg machine gun (p. MF30), and Izhmekh PYa pistol (p. MF20) are being introduced.

USA

A U.S. Army airborne or light infantry squad (9 men) consists of a squad leader, two team leaders, two SAW gunners, two grenadiers, and two riflemen. Squad leader, team leaders, and riflemen each have a Colt M4 assault carbine (p. MF26) with seven magazines, AN/PAS-4C IR laser (p. MF13), and M68 collimating sight (p. MF13), two M67 hand grenades (p. B209), and a M9 knife/bayonet (below), plus often an AN-M8 smoke (pp. B209, HT117, and W98) or AN-M18 colored smoke grenade. Two will also have an Alliant M136 LAW (licensed Bofors AT4, *Special Ops, Second Edition*, p. 103). The SAW gunners have a FN M249A1 (MINIMI, pp. HT120, TM80) with three 200-round belts and AN/PVS-4 night sight (p. MF14). Additional ammo for the SAWs will be distributed among the riflemen. The grenadiers have a carbine and a Colt M203A1 grenade launcher (pp. BO112, HT121) with eighteen grenades.

Platoon-level weapons include the Beretta M9 pistol (Mod 92F, pp. B208, C63, and HT108), FN M240B machine gun (MAG, p. HT120), and Lockheed-Raytheon FGM-148A Javelin ATGM.

A U.S. Marine Corps infantry squad (13 men) consists of a squad leader, three team leaders/grenadiers, three SAW gunners, and six riflemen. Squad leader and riflemen each have a Colt M16A2 assault rifle (p. MF17) with seven magazines, AN/PAS-4C IR laser, and M68 collimating sight, two M67 hand grenades, and a M9 knife/bayonet, plus often an AN-M8 smoke grenade. Three will also have an Alliant M136 LAW. The team leaders/grenadiers have a rifle and a Colt M203 grenade launcher (p. HT121) with eighteen grenades. The SAW gunners have a FN M249A1 with three 200-round belts and AN/PVS-4 night sight. Additional ammo for the SAWs will be distributed among the riflemen.

Platoon-level weapons include the Beretta M9 pistol, as well as usually the FN M240G machine gun (MAG, p. HT120) and McDonnell Douglas MK153 MOD 1 SMAW rocket launcher (see under IMI B-300, below) assigned from the company's weapons platoon.

More Firepower

Rifles

Ishapore INSAS AR, 5.56×45mm NATO, India, 1997 (Holdout -6)

The new Indian Army rifle is based on the Kalashnikov action, but has many external features of the FN FAL and other rifles as well. It has wooden furnishing (the stock being shaped like on the SMLE No. 3 Mk III) and a translucent plastic magazine. Early versions fired only single shots and 3-round limited bursts, but recent production guns will also fire full automatic (RoF 10**). A model with folding stock (Holdout -5) is issued to mechanized and airborne infantry.

There is also a squad automatic version made at Kanpur and known as the INSAS LMG. It has a bipod and larger

magazine, but is otherwise similar (see table).

IMI Tavor 2, 5.56×45mm NATO, Israel, 2002 (Holdout -4)

A new bullpup assault carbine with very short barrel, intended to replace all assault rifles and carbines currently in service with Israeli infantry units. The selection of barrel length may be a result of the close ranges the IDF is usually operating under. The weapon has a P-rail (p. MF11) typically fitted with a reflex sight (p. MF13) and uses M16-type magazines. Ejection can be easily changed from right to left.

It is available in a suppressed version with the barrel prepared to accept a sound suppressor (-6 Hearing, AS +21, p. MF16).

By exchanging the barrel and bolt, the Tavor 2 can alternatively fire 9×19mm Parabellum ammo using Uzi magazines; Dam 3d-1, SS 10, Acc 8, 1/2D 160, Max 1,900, Wt 7.4, AWt 1.3, RoF 15*, Shots 32, ST 10, Rcl -1.

The Tavor 2 Designated Marksman's Rifle (DMR) has a longer barrel, folding bipod (+1 Acc if firing prone), and typically mounts a 4X scope; Dam 5d(1.25), SS 12, Acc 11+2, 1/2D 800, Max 3,500, Wt 10.2, Holdout -5.

Machine Guns

Rheinmetall MG3, 7.62×51mm NATO, Germany, 1968 (Holdout -7)

The standard general-purpose machine gun of the German armed forces, this gun is essentially a post-war variant of the MG42 (pp. HT119, W97). It can use both disintegrating and non-disintegrating belts, which are usually packed in plastic drums of 100 rounds (attach to the weapon), small plastic cans of 120 rounds (attach to the weapon), or larger metal cans of 250 rounds. The MG3 features a bipod and folding anti-aircraft sight. Its polygonal rifled barrel is made by H&K. The gun was adopted by Angola, Bangladesh, Germany, Greece (license-made by EBO), Guinea-Bissau, Iran (license-produced by DIO at Mosalsalsasi Arsenal), Mozambique, Norway, Pakistan (license-made as MG3P by POF), Sao Tome & Principe, Saudi Arabia, Spain (license-produced as MG3S by Santa Bárbara), Togo, Tunisia, and Turkey (license-made by MKE). Older variants are even more widespread. The MG3 shows no signs of age, and will remain in service at least with the Germany military for many years.

Enfield L86A1 LSW, 5.56×45mm NATO, Great Britain, 1986 (Holdout -6)

The L86A1 Light Support Weapon is the squad automatic version of the L85A1 Individual Weapon (also known as the SA80, p. HT115). It differs in its longer barrel and integral bipod (+1 Acc if fired prone), but features the same L9A1 SUSAT tritium-illuminated 4X scope (p. MF13) and M16-type magazine well. Like the L85A1, it is accurate and performs reasonably well on the range in England, but abysmally under less ideal conditions. After-action troop reports on its service during the 1991 Gulf War and other operations were very bitter, citing frequent breaks, jams, and other malfunctions.

After more than a decade of denial, the British military had most of the inventory rebuilt by H&K of Germany, who redesigned a number of parts and replaced many others (Malf crit). The resultant L86A2 entered service in late 2001, and is intended to be used until 2015 . . .

IMI Negev, 5.56×45mm NATO, Israel, 1991 (Holdout -7)

The Negev is the Israeli military's squad automatic weapon, resembling the FN MINIMI (pp. HT120, TM80) not only in function, but also in many design details. It features a quick-change barrel, bipod (+1 Acc if fired prone), and folding stock. It can feed from disintegrating belts, Galil-type magazines or, using an adaptor, M16-type magazines. The belts come in soft cloth packs instead of the rattling plastic cans of the MINIMI. Adopted in 1990, the Negev entered production in 1991, but initial production was slow. It fully replaced the IMI MAG machine gun as the squad's automatic weapon in 1997. Interestingly enough, some Israeli special ops units such as the Sayeret Mat'kal seem to prefer the FN MINIMI-Para.

Rifle Grenades

Although grenade launchers are more prolific, there are still rifle grenades in use. Most modern types no longer need

special ballistite (blank) cartridges to propel them. They are either a *bullet-trap* design, launched by firing any service round that is trapped in the tail of the grenade, or a *bullet-through* design, in which the projectile passes through the hollow grenade. Western designs are fired from the muzzle of any rifle with a 22mm flash-hider, standard on most NATO rifles and many carbines. Below minimum range or if they fail to explode, rifle grenades do 1d crushing damage from a 5.56×45mm rifle or 1d+1 crushing from a 7.62×51mm rifle.

FN TELGREN, 40mm, Belgium, 1986 (Holdout -1)

The Telescoping Grenade (TELGREN) is a small HE bullet-through rifle grenade. It features a tail unit which telescopes into the warhead for minimized stowage and is extended before launch. It is fired from any 22mm flash-hider: from a 5.56×45mm rifle, Max is 330; from a 7.62×51mm rifle, Max is 440. The TELGREN was adopted by the Belgian and Indonesian militaries.

Rafael Simon 150, 100mm, Israel, 1992 (Holdout -3)

This bullet-trap rifle grenade was designed to breach doors and windows, especially in hostage-rescue operations and urban combat. Fitted with a stand-off aluminium rod (Holdout -4), it is fired from any 5.56×45mm rifle with 22mm flash-hider. The rod ensures proper distance of explosion, which destroys doors with minimal collateral damage. The Simon 150 is in service with the Israeli and French militaries and was adopted by the U.S. Army as the M100 Rifle-Launched Entry Munition (RLEM) in 2000.

GIAT GR-AP/AV-40-F1, 40mm, France, 1994 (Holdout -3)

This HEDP grenade is in service with the French military. It has a bullet-trap and can be launched from any 5.56×45mm rifle with a 22mm flash-hider. The shaped-charge penetrates more than 3 inches of armor steel.

Rocket Launchers

IMI B-300, 83mm, Israel, 1983

This is a reloadable rocket launcher originally designed for Israeli special ops units. Prior to firing, the round has to be attached to the rear of the reusable launching unit. The bipod gives +1 Acc when deployed. The primary rocket has a HEAT warhead, which will penetrate more than 17 inches of armor steel. There is also a HEMAT-HE-FT rocket (p. MF10) for attack of foes behind cover; 6d×6(5) + 3d [3d]. Three rounds can be carried in a special backpack, which weighs 34.1 lbs. loaded. The B-300 was adopted by El Salvador, Estonia, and Mexico, and served as the basis of the McDonnell Douglas MK153 MOD 0 SMAW adopted by the U.S. Marines (also see *High-Tech, Second Edition*, p. 124, and *Special Ops, Second Edition*, p. 103). The B-300 is no longer in service with Israeli units, having been replaced by the IMI Shipon LAW from the late 1990s.

Hunting LIA4 LAW80, 94mm, Great Britain, 1987

The LAW80 is a disposable anti-tank rocket launcher. For transport the tube is fitted with styrofoam protection caps at both ends (22 lbs.). Before firing, the caps have to be removed and the tube has to be extended to its full length of 5 feet. Readyng the weapon requires about 3 seconds. The integral Royal Ordnance spotting rifle is mounted below the rocket tube and fires 9×44mm L3A1 spotter-tracer rounds; Dam 3d, SS 16, Acc 8, 1/2D 550, Max 2,200, RoF 3~, Shots 5, Rcl -1. The tracer bullet has ballistics matched to the rocket and generates a flash upon impact with a hard surface. The semiautomatic plastic (!) rifle has an aluminum barrel and an integral, non-reloadable magazine. It is factory-loaded and ready-to-fire. The spotting rifle is fired until a hit is scored. The rocket can then be immediately triggered, with a +2 bonus to hit. The rocket has a HEAT warhead which will penetrate more than 26 inches of armor steel. The LAW80 has a non-magnifying, fold-out reflex sight (p. MF13), which is tritium-illuminated, adding +3 to reduce darkness penalties. It can also accept the Pilkington Kite 4X second generation image-intensifying night sight (+2 Acc, +2.6 lbs., p. MF14). The weapon is in service with Great Britain, Jordan, and Oman. In British service, it will be soon be replaced by a Swedish design

NORINCO 89 Shi, 80mm, China, 1989

The 89 Shi is a disposable light anti-tank weapon consisting of a fiberglass tube and a rocket with HEAT warhead. It will penetrate more than 18 inches of armor steel. A 2X scope is attached. The 89 Shi is in service with the People's Liberation Army of China.

Appendix

Knife/Bayonets

Almost all military rifles are capable of mounting a bayonet for melee fighting. Most modern bayonets are multi-purpose bowie-bladed knives (p. HT99). Treat as large knife if detached, and as 2-handed spear when afixed (p. B206, with Reach 1). Most weigh around 0.6 lbs. (1 lb. with scabbard) and cost \$75 in *fine* quality. Some rifles fix the bayonet horizontally instead of vertically, to allow the blade to better penetrate the ribs and also allow side-sweeping slashes (use Spear-2, with Dam sw-1 cutting) instead of just stabs (*Tip Slash* maneuver, see [Errata to GURPS Japan, Second Edition](#)).

One of the oldest multi-purpose designs is the bayonet used with the Russian Kalashnikov rifles. The *6Kh4* version (1974) has a 6.2-inch *average* blade, heavy pommel for use as hammer, and will serve as insulated wirecutter with its sheath attached. It will mount on the Izhmash AK-74, Izhmash AN-94, and H&K G36. \$20, 0.55 lbs., 0.9 lbs. with scabbard.

The bayonet furnished with the British Enfield L85A1 rifle (1986) is a 7-inch *cheap* blade which was designed to be used as an insulated wirecutter with its sheath attached. The sheath also features a fold-out saw for light woodwork. Like the rifle, it was plagued with problems and universally condemned by the troops. It is difficult to sharpen, owing to soft steel and ill-designed sharpening arrangements, and has a tendency to fall off the rifle. Broken-off blade tips are also common. And finally, the barrel of the rifle tends to bend when pushed too hard . . . \$75, 0.65 lbs., 1.2 lbs. with scabbard.

The U.S. military adopted the *M9* in 1986. The 7-inch *fine* blade is matte stainless and has a sawback and bottle-opener. With the plastic scabbard it can be used as an insulated wirecutter. The scabbard has an integrated sharpening stone, screwdriver, and a pouch accepting a small item such as a compass, pistol magazine, or multi-tool. It will mount on the Colt M4 and M16-series, as well as the OICW. The Chinese issue an unlicensed *average* copy for their NORINCO 95 Shi rifle. \$150, 1 lb., 1.7 lbs. with scabbard.

Weapon Tables

Pistols use Guns/TL (Pistol)

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
Beretta Mod 951 Brigadier, 9×19mm	crit	Cr	2d+2	10	3	150	1,850	2.1	0.3	3~	8+1	\$600	9	-1	7
Walther P1, 9×19mm	crit	Cr	2d+2	10	3	150	1,850	2.1	0.4	3~	8+1	\$900	9	-1	7
H&K P7M13, 9×19mm	ver	Cr	2d+1	10	2	140	1,800	2.5	0.6	3~	13+1	\$1,300	9	-1	7
NORINCO 92 Shi, 9×19mm	crit	Cr	2d+2	10	3	150	1,850	2.5	0.6	3~	15+1	\$400	9	-1	7

Rifles use Guns/TL (Rifle) for single shots, Guns/TL (Light Auto) for burst-fire

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
GIAT FR-F2, 7.62×51mm	crit.	Cr	7d	15	13+2	1,200	4,200	12.8	1	1/2	10+1	\$700	11B	-2	7
Ishapore INSAS AR, 5.56×45mm	crit	Cr	5d	12	10	500	3,500	9.2	0.75	3**	20+1	\$500	9	-1	7
IMI Tavor 2, 5.56×45mm	crit	Cr	4d(1.25)	10	8	400	2,500	7	1	14*	30+1	\$1,000	9	-1	7

Machine Guns use Guns/TL (Light Auto) for burst-fire, Guns/TL (Rifle) for single shots

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
Ishapore 1A LMG, 7.62×51mm	crit	Cr	7d	17	11	1,000	4,200	23.6	2.6	8*	30	\$1,000	13B	-1	7
Rheinmetall MG3, 7.62×51mm	crit	Cr	7d	17	8	1,000	4,200	32.7	7.4	20	120	\$2,700	13B	-2	7
FN MINIMI-Para, 5.56×45mm	crit	Cr	5d(1.25)	14	8	500	3,200	21.7	7	12	200	\$4,000	11B	-1	7
Enfield L86A1 LSW, 5.56×45mm	16	Cr	5d+1(1.25)	12	11+2	800	3,500	14.5	1	13*	30+1	\$700	10B	-1	7
IMI Negev, 5.56×45mm	crit	Cr	5d+1(1.25)	15	10	800	3,500	21.8	5.3	12*	150	\$5,000	11B	-1	7
Kanpur INSAS LMG, 5.56×45mm	crit	Cr	5d+1	13	10	800	3,500	14.8	1.1	11*	30+1	\$600	10B	-1	7

Hand Grenades use Throwing

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	Wt	Fuze	Cost	TL
ARGES HG84	crit	Exp.	3d+2 [3d]	1.1	4 seconds	\$25	7
NORINCO 86 Shi	crit	Exp.	2d-1 [3d]	0.6	5 seconds	\$5	7
Luchaire GR-MA-DF-F1	crit	Exp.	3d+1 [3d]	0.8	4 seconds	\$25	7
ADI F1	crit	Exp.	1d [3d]	0.8	4 seconds	\$25	7

Rifles Grenades use Guns/TL (Grenade Launcher)

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	Min	1/2D	Max	Wt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
TELGREN, 40mm	crit.	Exp.	2d-1 [2d]	18	5	5	-	440	0.7	1/4	1	\$100	10	-1	7
Rafael Simon 150, 100mm	crit.	Exp.	5d+1	18	5	20	-	100	1.2	1/4	1	\$1,500	10	-1	7

GIAT GR-AP/AV-40-F1, 40mm	crit.	E×p.	6d(10) + 2d [2d]	18	5	15	150	400	0.9	1/4	1	\$100	10	-1	7
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Rocket Launchers use Guns/TL (LAW)

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	Min	1/2D	Max	Wt	Awt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	TL
IMI B-300, 83mm	crit	E×p.	6d×6(10)	16	8	11	440	2,000	17.9	10	1/10	1	\$5,000	11	7
Hunting L1A4 LAW80, 94mm	crit	E×p.	6d×9(10)	16	8	22	550	2,200	19.8	-	1	1	\$1,500	11	7
NORINCO 89 Shi, 80mm	crit	E×p.	6d×6(10)	14	6+1	11	330	2,000	8.1	-	1	1	\$500	10	7

Thanks

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The Bat Pack

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Disclaimer

This article deals with mature themes without pulling punches, and may well be disturbing for some readers. If this does not sound like something you want in your game, do not read further.

Genre: Horror (*Mature*)

Style: Drama, Adventure

Fidelity: Variable

Themes: Hunger, Lies, and Power

Campaign Setting and Background Information

This CiaB should be set in a convenient real or imagined city with at least one hot nightspot for the Bat Pack to hang out in, and -- preferably -- significant PC hooks (for example, their hometown).

What Everybody Knows

It's the world, as we know it . . .

What Everybody Doesn't Know

. . . Or is it? Magicians, mad scientists, and monsters skulk in the shadows.

Why haven't they taken over?

1. Perhaps they did;
2. Mundane humanity isn't much of a challenge for them, because their abilities allow them to flout the laws of humanity with impunity; or
3. They're too busy murdering (and socializing with) each other.

Magicians, Mad Scientists, and Monsters

- *Magic & Magicians:* Magic is the process of awakening the power within things along lines laid down by expectation, superstition, old wives' tales, and urban legend. Magic does not come *ex nihilo*; it must be *activated*. So, magicians cannot throw fireballs, but they can pluck rabbits from top hats. Horseshoes can be charged with luck. Coca-Cola plus Pop Rocks can be enchanted into a powerful explosive. Mirrors can be charmed not to reflect vampires (see also *OPTION: Traditional Weaknesses -- Supernatural or Psychological?*).
- *Mad Science & Mad Scientists:* Mad Science is the process of adding or subtracting a characteristic to an object. Making robots sapient, modifying animals so that they can violate the square-cube ratio, building portals that transcend time and space, invisibility pills -- all done with (dubious) scientific trappings.
- *Monsters:* Note that the detailed vampire-based ancestry below need not be the only monstrous family tree in the campaign setting. Monsters descended from a saurian, faerie, or space alien lineage may have quite different

characteristics . . .

Vampirology

A number of different "monster" types branch from the vampire root: zombies, theriomorphs ("werewolves"), thrall vampires, and vampire lords. The type of monster that develops depends on the state of the human target (living or dead), and the vital fluid used to empower the target.

Vital Fluids: Two bodily fluids charged with vampiric power are blood and semen. In short, blood bequeaths power, and semen grants scope. Clarification appears below; however, before we get to the individual creature descriptions, some points should be made:

1. Only male vampire lords (not thralls) can directly sire new monsters (but see *OPTION: Vrykólaka* for an indirect method for female vampires to create new unlife, or *OPTION: Mother's Blood* for a direct method). A lord may create one thrall (or two theriomorphs or zombies) per season; thus, a lord could make two thralls, two theriomorphs, and two zombies in a single year. *Ancestors* create *descendants*.
2. The sharing of vital fluids means that the ancestor has mystical command over its descendants (of any stripe). This usually means a mild loyalty to the ancestor, with the ability to directly control over one descendant at a time. Individual descendant creatures may overcome the base-state loyalty, and may struggle against the ancestor's dominance, but in the end, the lord always wins. Upon the death of the ancestor, all descendants are free. Furthermore, there are methods for descendant creatures to gain autonomy (detailed below). Grand-ancestors may or may not be able to exercise control over their grand-descendants (GM's option).
3. If a monster consumes another monster, they gain in power and ability. However, this power gain stays within their type -- a zombie that eats a theriomorph's brain shouldn't gain shapeshifting abilities (unless the GM says that's okay), but should become stronger, tougher, and able to go a longer period before skull-snacking.
4. If a lord has vampiric sex with a theriomorph, the shapeshifter becomes a thrall; when it subsequently dies, it becomes a lord -- in either case, loyalty shifts to the new master. If a lord has vampiric sex with a zombie, the zombie becomes a lord (again, under the ancestor's dominion). If a lord gives blood to a thrall, all that happens is that the thrall need not feed the following night.

Zombie

- *Creation:* Vampire blood introduced into a corpse.
- *Powers:* A zombie feels no pain, never tires, and is as physically powerful as ten strong men.
- *Weaknesses:* Zombies must consume brain and nerve tissue weekly for three reasons: 1. to repair wear and tear on their bodies; 2. to feel emotions; and 3. to maintain their intellect. Without consuming somebody's gray matter at least once every seven days, zombies will not heal or have feelings, and will begin to get slower and stupider, until they are mindless shells.
- *Autonomy:* If a zombie eats the brain of its ancestor, it is no longer subject to the ancestor's domination.
- *Destruction:* Total body obliteration via explosion or fire.

Theriomorph (Also known as "Were-whatever")

- *Creation:* Living being consumes or is injected with vampire blood.
- *Powers:* Theriomorphs are as strong as five men and are as nimble as an Olympic athlete. They heal almost instantaneously and do not age; their senses are incredibly acute. They can shift into two alternate forms: 1. that of an animal (usually a large mammalian carnivore); and 2. that of a hybrid shape between their human and animal shapes -- a man-beast.
- *Weaknesses:* Theriomorphs must hunt and kill a sizable mammal once a month, then consume a large portion of

OPTION: Mother's Blood

If the sole transmission of vampirism by transfer of a lord's semen seems limiting, feel free to also allow "lady" vampires to pass it along through their own sexual fluids (or, even better, menstrual blood). You may even wish to change the base assumption of the setting, and say that only female vampires can make new vampires.

its muscle and organs. The hunt is important, as the bloody meat must be tainted with adrenaline and other flavors of fear. Contact with silver temporarily negates a theriomorph's shapeshifting and regeneration abilities.

- *Autonomy*: If a theriomorph eats the heart of its ancestor, it is no longer subject to the ancestor's domination.
- *Destruction*: As silver disrupts a theriomorph's ability to change form, this means they can be killed while touching silver, or with silver weapons. Substantial fire damage can also destroy a theriomorph. (See also the boxed text *OPTION: Vrykólaka*.)

Thrall Vampire (Also known as "Apprentice" or "Type I")

- *Creation*: Vampire semen introduced to a living being.
- *Powers*: Thrall Vampires are as physically powerful as two average men, have heightened senses, and are inordinately charismatic (this is probably linked to a combination of vampire pheromones and a subconscious shapeshifting response to match their target's body-type preferences). They are immune to damage from anything but organic material (wood, bone, fists, and the like), silver weapons, or fire. Thralls heal faster than normal from such damage, and have retarded aging. They may shapeshift into the form of a bat.
- *Weaknesses*: Thrall vampires must consume a pint of blood daily, from a human in a high state of sexual arousal. This savor of sex (mostly testosterone, endorphins, and other hormones) is a necessary component of feeding. As noted above, they may be harmed by organic material; indeed, when a piece of dead organic material penetrates their skin, vampires become paralyzed (the motivating force of the vampire attempt to grant the dead organic material unlife, which short-circuits the vampire's ability to move). Contact with silver interferes with both their bat-transformation and their remarkable charisma. While nauseated and weakened by daylight, it does not otherwise harm them.
- *Autonomy*: If a thrall drains all of the blood of its ancestor, it is no longer subject to the ancestor's domination.
- *Destruction*: When staked through the heart with an organic weapon, thralls are immobilized. They can then die by fire, sunlight, beheading, or starvation. However, if not burned or exposed to sunlight (and when the stake is removed), they will rise again as lords.

Vampire Lord (Also known as "Master" or "Type II")

- *Creation*: Vampire semen introduced to a corpse, or when a thrall vampire dies (without being destroyed).
- *Powers*: Vampire lords possess all the strength and agility of a theriomorph; incredibly acute senses; the personal magnetism of a Mesmer, Svengali, or Rasputin; and a formidable shapeshifting ability (limited to organic forms). They are immune to damage from anything but organic material (wood, bone, fists, etc.) or fire, heal rapidly from such wounds, and do not age at all. They may mentally control any descendants they have sired by blood or semen.
- *Weaknesses*: Like thralls, lords must consume blood daily, from a human in a high state of sexual arousal; however, lords require a quart of blood (or more). As noted above for thralls, lords may be harmed by organic material, and suffer the same paralysis. However, their mastery of shapeshifting means that they can extricate themselves from this situation readily. (A favorite tactic is the "collapse into dust" maneuver, after which the lord will merely reform.) Contact with silver disrupts their shapeshifting, regeneration, charisma . . . and their ability to control their progeny.
- *Autonomy*: If a lord drains all of the blood of its ancestor, it is no longer subject to the ancestor's domination.
- *Destruction*: Fire, of course. Direct sunlight will cause a vampire to boil away, as their shapeshifting cells are

OPTION: Vrykólaka

What happens when a theriomorph dies?

Technically, they're a corpse filled with blood of vampire origin . . . which creates a zombie. Here are three possibilities:

1. *Dead's dead, baby.*
2. *Conservation of Vital Fluid*: Dead theriomorphs become zombies, but the catch is they're permanently trapped as a zombie of their alternate form. Thus, a theriomorph becomes a zombie animal when killed in human form, and vice-versa. (If killed in hybrid form, they'd be a zombie hybrid.)
3. *Vrykólaka*: For that old-school Slavic vibe, a dead theriomorph will rise again as a vampire lord.

excited to energy states too high to stay together. A stake of wood with silver inlay will immobilize a vampire's body and interfere with its ability to change form. Thus, the preferred method to slay a vampire lord is to stake it with a silver-chased stake, and either burn it or wait for sunrise. Anything less will merely tick them off.

NPC Backgrounds

The Bat Pack

- **Daniel Marco aka "Danny":** Brains, constancy, and ruthlessness allowed this Hoboken kid to rise quickly in the ranks of the LaSalvia Family. Unfortunately, even he was caught unawares when the Ragusas erased them on the infamous "Night of Roses." Shot in the street and left for dead, he crawled three blocks while bleeding out his life. Luckily -- or unluckily -- the vampire Yvonne, intrigued by the young thug's tenacity, rescued him into unlife as her thrall. Oddly, Danny never could quite remember what she did to create him. With his new abilities as a thrall vampire, Danny served as Yvonne's weapon in annihilating their common enemy: the Ragusas. However, the vampire lady grew tired of the stubborn capo, and sent him to his doom (see below, *Bat Pack Backstory*). The powerful force of personality he possessed while living has only intensified since he became a vampire (even as a thrall, he had the charisma of a lord); since his rebirth as a master vampire (see below), it has grown to messianic levels. Over and above his undead powers, he is an expert fighter, an expert thinker and researcher, and a master charmer. His loyalty to his friends is unmatched, as is his hatred of treachery. Danny is mildly homophobic, and is openly hetero-chauvinist. His abhorrence of Yvonne has more to do with betrayal than sexual orientation . . . but that might not be obvious.
- **Maxwell Lincoln aka "Maxie":** Born in Harlem, multi-talented Maxie - singer, dancer, musician, actor -- loved to entertain. While attending Julliard, he started doing street-performance to earn folding green. That's when he caught Yvonne's eye. Entranced with the nimble youth, she bound him to her with blood, making him into a theriomorph (specifically, a were-panther). In addition to his supernatural abilities and remarkable artistic talents, he's also now a master gymnast and gunman, expert fighter, and a good occult researcher. He would walk alongside Jimmy to the Gates of Hell if asked, and would follow Danny even beyond that. While disciplined in his artistic endeavors to a perfectionist level, he loses all control when it comes to his hobby: chasing skirts. A pretty face can wrap Maxie around her finger easily. He hates Yvonne because she stole his will and forced him to kill Danny (who, luckily, rose again as a lord). He'll get revenge on her for making him a slave.
- **James Falcon aka "Jim," "Jimmy":** Hailing from Steubenville, Ohio, Jimmy Falcon's greatest possessions while living were a laconic nature, a mellow voice, and a great right cross. This last served him best during his days in the professional boxing ring. After refusing to take a dive in the fifth, the Ragusa Family sent him to sleep with the fishes in the East River. In an experimental mood, Yvonne had Danny and Maxie steal several corpses from City Morgue, stitched them together, and injected some of her blood. A "mostly-Jimmy" construct came to unlife as a zombie. Just as stubborn as Danny is, Jimmy also balked under Yvonne's domination; his generally pessimistic outlook may have allowed him to be the first to realize their fateful mission (see below) was a set-up. In

OPTION: Traditional Weaknesses -- Supernatural or Psychological?

There was a time when you held a cross in front of a vampire and he cowered before the might of the object. Then, the bloodsuckers only recoiled at the power of belief of the wielder, or due to their psychological responses to the crucifix. Which brings us to today, where holding up a cross to a nosferatu is about as effective as holding up an Elvis CD. Progress? I think not.

In the basic Bat Pack setting, the traditional weaknesses of monsters -- crosses, mirrors, wolfsbane flowers, salt -- hold little power in and of themselves. However, individual objects or situations can be stimulated through magic to affect the undead.

This means that while a vampire will not normally need to sleep in his native earth, it can be *compelled* to follow that requirement. The right words and ritual could:

- Make a pair of crossed sporks a powerful ward;
- Force a vampire to bend down to pick up a handful of scattered mustard seeds;
- Cause a theriomorph

addition to his zombie physical prowess, Danny is a master boxer, an expert driver, a good mechanic, and a good cook. Even in life a prodigious drinker, in undeath he's taken to a cocktail of gin, embalming fluid, and human adrenochrome. His loathing of Yvonne stems from his belief that out of all the owners of his various parts, *he* had been snatched from the Pearly Gates to animate the body. The fact that she tried to blow him and his friends up doesn't sit well, either.

- **Yvonne Russ aka "Ivan," also "Johanna Zipes":** Yvonne was born in the late Eighteenth Century as a Slavic peasant boy named Ivan. Woken to unlife in 1797, he suffered cruelly under his ancestor, a dread vampire lord named Jurgen. He suffered his second death in 1808, and won his autonomy when Jurgen was staked and burned in Prussia in 1825. Over time, Ivan slowly shifted into a female persona, finding it much easier to feed in that form. As female suffrage blossomed, he found less and less reason or desire to shift back to a male body. Bisexual, Ivan/Yvonne has had many lovers, created many progeny, and destroyed many supernatural foes. Her bloody past means she has many enemies, which is why she seeks out potent magical protections and new Mad Science techniques. Currently, she's seeking the Ring of Ra, which she believes will allow her to walk abroad in daylight, essentially making her truly immortal. She believes the Bat Pack destroyed, but realizes she's being hunted. This makes her justifiably paranoid. She is intelligent, an expert reader of people, a master liar, mind-bogglingly wealthy, a (surprisingly) poor occultist, and possesses all of the abilities of a master vampire at a high level. However, she's a megalomaniac -- overconfident to the nth degree. Her inability to find the Ring of Ra frustrates her immensely.

Yvonne's New Crew

- *Paul "Apollo" Justbridge:* This city alderman is Yvonne's thrall, embraced for his stunning good looks, connections, and elected position. Secretly, but eagerly, he arranges local politics to her benefit.
- *Winnifred "Winni" Smith:* Winni's a zombie -- a badass biker chick who wiped-out at seventy miles per. She now serves as Yvonne's enforcer.
- *Wilhelm Ribble:* Wil "majored" in Mad Science at University before they threw him out. Yvonne's bankrolling his experiments combining Mad Science and Magic; he also supervises occasional side-projects using vampire vital fluids.
- *Norma Henson:* Norma -- a chubby girl due to her chronic overeating -- is now a theriomorph in Yvonne's service. Enraptured by her sleek wolf and wolf-woman forms, she'll gladly die in her mistress's defense.
- *Mozart:* One of Wil's experiments involving both Mad Science and vampire's blood, this cat has been granted human-level intelligence, and is able to communicate with the rest of the crew in a combination of verbal and scratched code signals. He serves Yvonne as spy, and believes that she will aid him in one day gaining a true human form.

Jesse Rook aka "Father Jess": Three hundred years ago, they would have burned him at the stake for practicing sorcery; today, he was simply defrocked. A former Catholic priest, Jesse explored interdicted grimoires and tomes in a search for power. Now, unhampered by the need to keep the Church in the dark, he has leaped forward, becoming a true master of the Art. He owns the Ring of Ra, which provides power and insight, but with terrible consequences (see below). He lives in a sanctum beneath the Old Withers' Place. Since he has become one of the best sorcerers on the continent, he is searching for other ways to satisfy his hunger for respect (money, Mad Science, monstrosity, etc.).

Items & Locations

to uncontrollably change into animal form when struck by moonlight;

- Make wolfsbane into a werewolf repellent *or* cure;
- Allow holy water, consecrated hosts, or Communion wine to burn like acid;
- Prevent a monster from walking on sacred ground, crossing running water, enter a house, etc.

Depending upon how the GM wishes to spin it, this could reflect something like a cross between Chaos Magick and Alchemy on the supernatural side, or playing on deep-rooted instinctual archetypes on the psychological side.

NOTE: Fire: The

- Hatankamen's Days*: A twelfth century quarto volume containing a surprising amount of reasonably factual undead history, lore, and myth. In vulgar Latin, said to be translated from Alexandrian Greek via Arabic.
- *The Old Withers' Place*: An old Victorian "haunted house"; warded, guarded, and hidden against everything from vampires to Girl Scouts, courtesy of Jesse's mightiest spells. It cannot be located or breached magically, is difficult to locate using mundane methods, and the undead must be invited to enter by an untainted human standing within.
 - *The Ring of Ra*: A magical Egyptian ring said to grant tremendous healing, clairvoyant, and magical powers when exposed to sunlight. May have a hidden curse. Location unknown (save to Jesse Rook).

Biblical Cleanser!

"Fire is good. Fire is good, yes. Fire is our friend, yes."
-- Harold, the Blind Man,
Young Frankenstein

Fire works against all monsters. Period. (Okay, zombies don't *feel* it, but it still works.)

Events & Possible Story Arcs

First, some exposition on the Bat Pack and Yvonne, as well as what they're doing in the campaign city. Second, details on the Basic Story Arc of the campaign. Third, three possible Spins with suggested PC Hooks and Suggested Scenes. Last, some discussion on how to manage PC impact on the Basic Story Arc.

Bat Pack Backstory

Two years ago, Yvonne discovered that a rival vampire lord, Dmitri the Dark, owned *Hatankamen's Days*, a powerful magical tome. Said to hold the answers to many mysteries of undead lore, she decided that she must have it. Dmitri wished to keep it. Thus, vampire war.

Yvonne sent the Bat Pack to steal the book. However, having tired of their personalities and stubborn resistance to her rule, she set them up to take a fall while she swiped the tome. Her theft went off without a hitch.

Meanwhile, Danny, Maxie, and Jimmy had their hands full with Dmitri. The vampire lord spilled the beans to Danny that Yvonne was really Ivan, that she used them to snatch the book on her own, and informed them that he had to kill them for distracting him. Battle ensued.

The Bat Pack managed to defeat Dmitri. Taking turns, they seized from him what they hungered for -- blood, heart, and brain. Then, they returned home to settle scores with Yvonne.

Danny confronted Yvonne, backed up by Maxie and Jimmy. Yvonne told them she was sick of them, that they were expendable, and that's all they deserved anyway. Danny flipped out and attacked her.

Having trouble maintaining control of all of them at once, Yvonne focused on Maxie, and puppeteered him into staking Danny. Under cover of this tragedy, she escaped, and triggered the self-destruct firebomb. The lair exploded.

Luckily, the Bat Pack escaped more or less intact. After Maxie removed the stake, Danny rose as a vampire lord. Abject apologies, murmured acceptances, and growled curses. They agreed to stick together to find and punish Yvonne. Danny is furious because of her betrayal of him, Maxie hates her because she made him a slave (and forced him to almost destroy his best friend), and Jimmy wants to get her back because he doesn't like anyone pushing him around.

The Bat Pack travels around, having a good time drinking, dancing, screwing . . . and searching for revenge.

Basic Story Arc

The Basic Story Arc of the Bat Pack CiaB, without PC involvement, is as follows:

1. Yvonne is hunting the Ring of Ra.

2. The Bat Pack is hunting Yvonne.
3. Yvonne discovers the existence of either Rook or the Old Withers' Place.
4. The Bat Pack realizes Yvonne is close.
5. The Bat Pack discovers the existence of either Rook or the Old Withers' Place.
6. Yvonne and the Bat Pack catch up with Rook, and each other.
7. Pandemonium.
8. Aftermath; either:
 - A. Rook retains the Ring.
 - B. Yvonne gains the Ring.
 - C. The Bat Pack gains the Ring.
 - D. The Ring is lost or destroyed.

Of course, once a group of PCs get involved, this outline changes (see below). In order to build the characteristic tension of a horror campaign, each element of the Basic Story Arc should proceed at a measured pace -- it's not a race to the end. However, spending more than a single session (or at the outside, two sessions) on each element may lead to boredom rather than terror.

Spins

Here are three Spins, which give different methods for integrating PCs into the situation. Immediately following are *Flavors of Fear* and *TOOL: Spicing Situations* for sparking ideas for scene dressing.

SPIN 1: Working for "Johanna"

PC Hook: The PCs are investigators hired by sexy "Johanna Zipes" to either: 1. track down the Old Withers' Place; 2. find out who's following her; 3. find Jesse Rook; or 4. some combination of these.

Suggested Scenes: Discovery of Maxie shadowing Johanna; the New Crew spies on the PCs; Confrontation with Maxie (may include the New Crew; may lead into a chase scene where the other Bat Pack -- and/or the New Crew -- members fall in behind the PCs and start picking *them* off); Johanna tempts a PC with promises of power and sex; Discovery of Rook's Hideout; four-way confrontation at the Old Withers' Place; Johanna revealed as Yvonne; Climactic Pandemonium; Aftermath.

SPIN 2: Hanging Around With the Bat Pack

PC Hook: PCs meet these three guys who blew into town and are making quite a splash (could be friendly, could be hostile).

Suggested Scenes: Meet the Bat Pack; Resolve if friend or foe; the New Crew shadows the Bat Pack and the PCs; Confrontation with the New Crew (whether or not the Bat Pack is friend or foe); Discovery of Johanna; Discovery of Rook's Hideout; four-way confrontation at the Old Withers' Place; Johanna revealed as Yvonne; Climactic Pandemonium; Aftermath.

SPIN 3: Self-Motivated Meddling Kids

PC Hook: PCs investigating a rash of mysterious deaths ("serial killings"); PCs are searching for Ring of Ra themselves; a related NPC falls under the spell of either Yvonne or the Bat Pack; Yvonne or the Bat Pack approach the PCs, because they know Jesse, or because the PCs are the local supernatural power structure; Jesse asks for help in defending self against monsters.

Suggested Scenes: New Crew and Bat Pack arrive; Lots of bodies; Confrontation with the New Crew and/or the Bat Pack; Johanna "rescued" from New Crew by PCs; Bat Pack approaches PCs for truce; Johanna puts PCs on Bat Pack's trail; Bat Pack puts PCs on Yvonne's trail; Jesse asks for help; Discovery of Rook's Hideout; four-way confrontation at

the Old Withers' Place; Johanna revealed as Yvonne; Climactic Pandemonium; Aftermath.

Rolling with the (PCs') Punches

No scenario survives contact with the PCs. Here follow some suggestions for how some of the NPCs will react at particular decision points that could cause a change of the game-state:

Yvonne:

- *Discovery of Bat Pack on the scene:* Use PCs as shields, distractions, or footsoldiers.
- *Discovery by the PCs of her true nature:* Send her New Crew to kill them.
- *Destruction of her New Crew by PCs:* Delay PC slaughter until she has the Ring of Ra.
- *Destruction of the Bat Pack by PCs:* Reward them mightily; offer to make them part of her New Crew.
- *Subornment of a PC:* Use PC to gain the Ring, then command him to hand it over.
- *PC gains the Ring of Ra:* Try to trick him out of it; tempt him; control him; kill him.

The Bat Pack:

- *Discovery of PCs' employment by Yvonne:* Use PCs to get to her.
- *Discovery by the PCs of their true nature:* Parley for a truce; if that fails, try to get them out of the way.
- *Destruction of a Bat Pack member by PCs:* Immediately destroy PCs; if first attempt fails, delay until after gaining the Ring.
- *Destruction of the New Crew by PCs:* Congratulate them; offer to team up to get Yvonne.
- *Destruction of Yvonne by PCs:* Thank them mightily; go for the Ring themselves.
- *Subornment of a PC:* Use PC to shield, distract, or attack Yvonne from ambush.
- *PC gains the Ring of Ra:* Offer a quid pro quo in cash for it; otherwise, kill him.

Jesse:

- *Discovery of monsters seeking the Ring of Ra:* Hunker down in the Old Withers' Place.
- *Discovery of PCs' employment by Yvonne:* Tell them the truth about her; offer to help kill her; try to kill PCs.
- *Discovery of PCs' knowledge of the Bat Pack:* Tell them the truth about them; offer to help kill them; try to kill PCs.
- *PC gains the Ring of Ra:* Try to trick him out of it; offer money; steal it back; kill him.

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Genre: Horror

Just go read [GURPS Horror Third Edition](#), by Ken Hite; it's everything one needs to know about scaring the bejeezus out of their players.

I'd like to focus on two important things, in my opinion:

First, the core of horror is to build tension, followed by a release. Tension is best built by slowly placing the character in a state of anxious stress -- something is going on, but what exactly is not clear. The character's attention should be directed to this *absence* of knowledge, terror grows as the character attempts to piece together the situation. Tiny incongruous details or stimuli (a shattered tooth, a unnatural cold spot, the wind moaning upstairs) interrupt this nullity of information with useless or misleading data. Then, a short and sudden appearance of a necessary piece of the answer (a suicide note behind the radiator, a bloody knife in the dishwasher, a werewolf springing from the closet) provides the catharsis. (Delaying this release with an "it was only the cat" moment takes the tension off boil and places it on simmer; this sort of escalation can, if used wisely, lead to a bigger catharsis deeper into the story.)

Second, decide if the focus on the game is to frighten the *players* or the *characters*. In a perfect world, the two go hand-in-hand, but some folks don't want to be afraid or anxious when gaming.

Openly making character, not player, terror an overt goal for the campaign may add an acceptable amount of distance for those players uninterested in being personally scared. (Of course, an up-front announcement sours the potential of having a "bait & switch" campaign, where the characters *and* the players get nervous when they realize that they're way out of their depth.) Terror as a character goal can be buttressed by experience points, in-game benefits, and other such rewards for playing one's character if they lived in a horror novel or movie rather than in a RPG (e.g., going into the creepy basement or attic alone, gibbering ineffectually in a corner, flipping out and running around screaming, or vociferously denying the supernatural in the face of reasonable evidence). Extra kudos and prizes should be dealt out if the PC successfully "metagames" a character hook into a story hook (e.g., offering up their little sister as a victim for the werewolf, suggesting that the Ring of Ra may be hidden under the floorboards of their apartment, or maneuvering their character into position to be tempted by the promise of vampiric immortality).

Theme(s)

- *Hunger*: A monster's gotta eat. But that's true of any (un)living thing. Characters in a Bat Pack campaign are hungry for everything: money, power, safety, love. Figure out what the NPCs want, then pretend that they're starving and that their goal is a nice, big, juicy steak. This can aid in evoking the desperation and drive of horror scenes.
- *Lies*: When one's very form is a whim -- or must be carefully hidden just to interact in society -- lies and deceptions cloak everything. No one is merely what they appear to be, or means exactly what they say. Remember that the best way to tell a lie is to either stick to the truth as close as possible, or wildly prevaricate. When truth is uncertain, paranoid thoughts take off, setting terror on the wing.
- *Power*: The capabilities of the monster are beyond that of mortal man. They can do things people only dream of. They are beyond censure, law, morality. They possess power, and are unafraid to use it. But for what ends? Usually dark, selfish ones. When one sees the means used to achieve such ends, horror can result.
- *Sex*: Vampiric sex is not about love, or even passion. It's about hunger (for pleasure or companionship), about lies (for the joy of performance), about power (to increase one's followers and protect oneself), and -- mostly -- about *control* (so one can directly rule another being against their will).

Variable Fidelity

A variable level of fidelity (or how closely characters match the physical and psychological characteristics of the real world) works well in the horror genre -- especially when the protagonists are of High Fidelity and the antagonists are of Low Fidelity. Face it, Dracula far outmatched Van Helsing's little gang -- it's a wonder they were able to defeat him (or did they? -- check out Fred Saberhagen's books). Pick up any horror book, and you'll rarely find an ex-SEAL thaumaturgist as the hapless hero; you're more likely to find school teachers, insurance salesmen, and taxi drivers in the hot seat. Be aware: powerful PCs can force a sea change from "horror" to simply "supernatural adventure," and there's nothing wrong with going that way if you want.

Flavors of Fear

Let us define four flavors or types of fear:

- *Fright* is a sudden shock causing uncontrolled and unreasoning fear of a relatively short duration. (Someone jumping up and saying "Boo!")
- *Terror* is an intense fear that is prolonged, involving imagined or future dangers. (The scrabbling at the door which dies away . . . only to make its way along the wall to the unsecured window.)
- *Horror* is a sense of shock at a danger that is also evil. (The vampire lord telling his victim the sick violations he will perform upon their loved one.)
- *Panic* is a sudden shock causing uncontrolled and unreasoning fear of a prolonged duration. (Someone pushes a

claustrophobic into a closet.)

To enhance the horror-quotient of a scene, keep these flavors in mind when assembling and describing situations.

TOOL: Spicing Situations

To inject a little adrenaline into a scene, pick the flavor of fear you wish to evoke, then roll on the relevant table to inspire (or modify) the events or imagery of the situation. Note that some of these "spices" can do triple-duty for Fright, Terror, or Horror, depending upon how they're depicted. Roll as many times as you want, combine options, or simply select the one that suits what you want to suggest.

Example: The PCs are sitting around in a bar, discussing the clues they've discovered individually about "Johanna Zipes." The GM feels it's time to evoke a little fear. He's looking for Terror, so he rolls three times on the Terror table to get ideas. He gets 3, 5, and 11: We're Being Watched, It's Quiet -- Too Quiet . . . , and They're All In On It. The GM decides that some of the bar's staff are on the antagonist's side, and are eavesdropping on the PCs' discussion. When a sudden lull in conversation happens, the PCs discover that the waitresses and bartender are staring at them, but quickly avert their eyes and busy themselves. (It's not paranoia if they really are out to get you . . .)

Fright (1d6):

- 1 or 2** (Loud Noise/Horrible Image/Noxious Smell/Collapsing Scenery)!
- 3** Ouch, That Hurts!/(Fall Down!)
- 4** It's Here!
- 5** Something Moves!
- 6** That Didn't Work!

Terror (2d6):

- 2** Something's Coming!
- 3** We're Being Watched.
- 4** Something's Wrong . . .
- 5** It's Quiet -- Too Quiet . . .
- 6** We're (Isolated/Trapped)!
- 7** There's More than One of Them.
- 8** What Was That (Soft Noise/Fleeting Glimpse/Faint Odor)?
- 9** The Others Are In Trouble
- 10** Did Something Just Move (Which Shouldn't've)?
- 11** They're All In On It.
- 12** Look, A (Creepy) Clue!

Horror (1d6):

- 1** Yuck! I think I'm going to be Sick!
- 2** You Can't Be Here . . . You're Dead!
- 3** (He's/She's/Its) Dead . . . And In Pieces
- 4** Are You Trying to Seduce Me?
- 5** No One Will Believe The Truth!

* (*Panic* is left out here, as it arises from within the character. Having the GM mandate prolonged unreasoning fear for a PC seems invasive. With luck, the players will roleplay panic unprompted.)

Other Resources & Inspirations

- [*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*](#) (TV Show)
- [*Dracula 2000*](#)
- [*The Elementals*](#) by Bill Willingham, (especially the villain [Captain Cadaver](#)).
- [*House of Frankenstein*](#)
- [*Innocent Blood*](#)
- [*The Madness Season*](#), by CS Friedman
- [*Monster Squad*](#)
- [*Ocean's 11*](#)
- [*Robin and the 7 Hoods*](#)
- [*The Third Chimpanzee*](#), by Jared Diamond
- Fred Saberhagen's [Dracula](#) series

Cosmic Tilt

A Game for 2 Players

by P.D. Magnus

"How did the Tilt start, granny?" The youngster looked up at Leeda expectantly.

"It was a darker age, and the Galactic Empire was torn apart by war. It may be hard to believe, but disputes were settled by whole armies then. The greatest minds of that time decided that something must be done to restore order. Their idea was that each party to a conflict should send only a single champion to fight.

"We have moved beyond the need for war, but ritual combat serves an important social and cultural function in the New Empire. It is that combat that we call the Cosmic Tilt."

In "Cosmic Tilt," each player takes the role of an alien psychic and battles to be the last brain thinking. You get rules for the game, "Cosmic Tilt" record sheets, and a half-dozen special characters. You provide a standard deck of playing cards and a few coins or beads to act as damage counters.

[Click here for the PDF!](#)

1.1 Components

- 1 standard playing card deck, with jokers
- 1 "Cosmic Tilt" Record Sheet for each player
- 4 counters for each player; coins do nicely



1.2 Setting Up

Players put a counter on the "OK" spot on the damage track for each region of their brain. They equitably decide who goes first; subsequent turns alternate between them.

[Click here for the PDF components!](#)

Alien Brain

1.3 Anatomy of an Alien Brain

The contest involves four regions of an alien's brain. Each region has a distinct function and may be attacked separately. In the game, each region is associated with a particular suit of cards.



The *Anterior Lobe* is the durable part of the brain used to generate the weakest of the three mental attacks. Its suit is Diamonds.

The *Posterior Lobe* generates a primal truncheon, the mainstay attack. Its suit is Clubs.

The *Superior Lobe* powers the Royal Mind Job, the most powerful of attacks. Its suit is Spades.

The *Brain Stem* is a delicate portion of the brain that controls the alien's reflexes. It is the seat of an alien's mental defenses, and its suit is Hearts.

2. Game Play

On your turn, you may either attack or focus. Attacking uses a card from your hand, while focussing replenishes your hand.

2.1 Attack

If you choose to attack, make one attack and then draw one card.

There are three basic attacks, each drawing on a different region of the alien's brain and each represented by a different range of cards. The attacks do damage to the region associated with the suit of the card: Clubs do damage to the Posterior Lobe, Diamonds to the Anterior Lobe, Hearts to the Brain Stem, and Spades to the Superior Lobe.

By playing 2, 3, 4, or 5, you deliver a one-pip attack against your opponent. It does 1 point of damage to the region indicated. If your Anterior Lobe has been disabled, you can not make one-pip attacks. (Although you can still play 2's, 3's, 4's, and 5's for defense -- see below.)

By playing a 6, 7, 8, 9, or 10, you clobber your opponent with a two-pip attack, doing 2 points of damage to the region indicated. If your Posterior Lobe has been disabled, you can not make two-pip attacks. (But you can still use 6's, 7's, 8's, 9's, and 10's for defense.)

By playing a face card (Jack, Queen, or King), you lay the most powerful hurt upon your opponent. The three-pip attack does 3 points of damage to the region indicated. If your Superior Lobe has been disabled, you can not make three-pip attacks. (Face cards cannot be used for defense, so if your Superior Lobe is disabled they are dead weight.)

After you play an attack, the target either defends or takes damage, and the cards used for the attack and defense are discarded. You then draw one (and only one) card, ending your turn.

2.2 Focussing

Instead of attacking, you may choose to concentrate and gather your resources. Draw enough cards to bring your hand up to five cards. If there are not enough cards left in the deck, then reshuffle the discard pile the first time this happens. If this happens a second time, then the game ends and is judged on points.

When focussing, you may want to discard some cards before drawing. You may discard only cards that you cannot play because of disabled lobes in your own or your opponent's brain, but you may discard any number of such cards.

2.3 Defense

When attacked, you have a chance to defend yourself. There are two sorts of defenses: Skill Defenses which are made with the numbered cards (2 through 10) and Ace Defenses.

A Skill Defense requires one or more numbered cards which total the value of the attack card. Numbered attack cards have a value of their number; face cards have a value of ten. The defense cards may be of any suit or combination of suits. To make a Skill Defense, show the defense cards when attacked and then discard them. You deflect the attack and take no damage.

Example: You have five cards in your hand: the 3 of Hearts, the 3 of Diamonds, the 4 of Clubs, the 6 of Hearts, and the Jack of Spades. Your opponent attacks with the King of Hearts. This will do three pips of damage to your brain stem if you don't defend. You can defend with any numbered cards that total 10 -- you decide to play the 4 and 6. The attack is deflected, and the cards used to attack and defend are discarded. Now it's your turn, but you only have three cards left in your hand.

An Ace Defense requires an Ace of the suit corresponding the region being attacked. Show the Ace and discard it. You take no damage.

If your Brain Stem is disabled, you cannot defend against attacks.

2.4 Damage

When you take damage, move the marker along the damage track for the damaged region. The marker begins at "OK" (no damage) and after enough damage moves to "X" (disabled). The Anterior Lobe can sustain 7 points of damage before being disabled, the Brain Stem only 5, and the other regions 6. A lobe can take no further damage after it is disabled -- there is no point in attacking it again.

After the first region of a contestant's brain becomes disabled, he loses an ability -- either the ability to make one kind of attack or the ability to defend.

If a second region becomes disabled, the contestant is knocked out and loses the match.

2.4 Jokers

By playing a Joker along with an attack, you may make the attack so forceful that defense against it is impossible. To use a joker in this way, you must play it along with the original attack, before your opponent decides whether or not to defend. Discard the Joker along with the attack card.

You can also use a Joker as a wild card in place of any other number or face card.

3. Ending the Match

If a contestant has two or more lobes of his brain disabled, he is knocked-out and his opponent wins.

If the deck has been depleted twice, the game ends. Players total their scores: lobes are worth the number of points indicated on the damage track, disabled lobes are worth nothing. The player with the highest score is the winner.

If players have the same score -- or if they are somehow knocked-out simultaneously -- then the match is a tie.

4. Famous Brains

The game comes with six special characters; each a seasoned veteran of the Tilt. Each player can pick one special character before the game begins, gaining the special power described on the character card.

Folded Characters

5. Strategy and Tactics



- Luck plays a role in "Cosmic Tilt," but better strategy wins out over lucky exuberance in the long haul. One of the recurring choices in the game is when to focus rather than attack. Generally, you should try to keep at least three cards in your hand for defense.
- Setting the rhythm of attacks so that you focus just after your opponent does gives you a powerful advantage. If you can attack just before your opponent needs to focus, it doesn't matter if you have anything left in your hand to defend with -- he can't counter-attack when he focusses, and you will be able to draw more cards on your next turn.
- You should play three-pip attack when you can, because they take up space in your hand but can't be used to defend. Similarly, you should play Aces when you can since they can't be used to attack.
- You should hang on to cards below 6, since they're more useful as versatile defense cards than feeble one-pip

attacks.

- Especially early in the game, you should try to target your opponent's Brain Stem so as to remove his ability to defend -- unless your opponent has a character like Rowena or Daka whose special power uses on a particular lobe of his brain.
- These rules of thumb can come into conflict, of course, and you are left to sort out the tough cases. Strategy should depend in part on your own tolerance for risk, but also depends on how far along the game is. It's safer to press the attack before you're in danger of being KO'd.

6. Acknowledgements

Significant credit for playtesting and refining the game is due Cristyn Magnus. Any remaining faults in the game persist from the original design and should be credited to the author.

Headings and subheadings in the game are in Sweet as Candy, a font by Jakob Fischer.

Pyramid Review

The Great Space Drag Race

Published by [Holistic Design Inc.](#)

Game Design by Chris Wiese and Craig Zipse

Graphics and Development by Craig Zipse

full-color components, ziplock bag; \$14.95

Ladies and gentlemen, start your stardrives. Holistic Design Inc.'s *The Great Space Drag Race* is a flatline flight to the finish, but just because the game -- and the course -- are straightforward doesn't mean it'll be easy.

The race is run on a straight length of track with the stars as a backdrop. The object is to be the first dragster to fully cross the finish line or, barring that, be the last dragster still in one piece when hostilities have subsided. Hostilities? Yes, it's that kind of game. Speed is an asset, but if it doesn't work, you can always fire a missile up the lead ship's tailpipe.

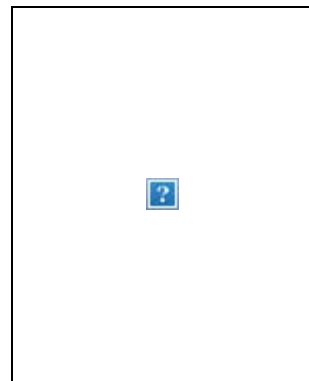
Each player (2-4 of them) picks a dragster and takes its ship control console (a sheet with current stats and places for cards and weapons). The ships are all the same, and the game comes with a selection of small starship miniatures and stands to raise them off the tabletop. (If that's too fancy for your taste, you can resort to using the plain-vanilla square counters instead.) Everyone gets four Equipment cards, and each person chooses one to use for the game's duration. Equipment may jazz up your movement or add new weapons to your battery, among other effects. Pick initiative counters to determine your starting position (or roll one of the four small but colorful dice Holistic includes). Set your shields at 10, your Hull to 6, and your Speed to 1. Load up three missiles and five mines, put your Equipment card in the cargo bay, and you're ready to burn ether.

Players have the option of drawing a Break Out card before the first turn is fully underway. These determine if you start off normally, suffer a slow start, or begin the race with a boost. You're taking your life into your hands, because some of the cards will destroy you outright (which is why those deadly cards are optional). Once the bravest among you have played the Break Out cards, everyone decides initiative (yes, getting a "pole position" of sorts doesn't mean you get to go first).

Players draw four Movement cards from the deck and look to see if any are "events." If so, they must play one (and only one) in initiative order. An eager fan may throw a mine onto the track to help you (his favorite racer), wreckage may block the track, or you may be able to refill used weapons counters. Once events are finished and discarded, players draw until their hand is nothing but Movement cards.

You can play one Movement card for every point of current speed, from 1 to 3. Cards are placed in one of three slots, and each slot is resolved in initiative order. The cards show movement as a diagram of hexes -- for the most part, you'll move left, right, or straight ahead (you're usually limited to entering one of the three hexes in front of your vehicle). The card will also tell you how many hexes to move, though this may be affected by events played or equipment working for you in the cargo bay.

The track is only five lanes wide, so you'll invariably get in one another's way. If you hit another ship during movement, you simply bounce him along in front of you; if you hit the wall, you bounce off it. You may drop a mine or fire a missile every time you execute a movement card. Weapons typically do 1d6 damage to your shields. Shields regenerate two points of energy each turn, but if they reach zero they short out for the rest of the race and damage goes



to work on your hull. If the hull goes, your ship becomes a Wreckage counter (another 1d6 hazard). Mines stay where they're put for ships to run into, while missiles are fired forward (up to six spaces), and themselves move much like ships until they hit an enemy.

When a player's ship passes completely over the finish line, he wins. Everyone else can vie for second and third, if they like.

The game is a quick play, and a full race only takes about ten minutes once you've got the rules down. The system is simple, game play is intuitive, and the bright and colorful pieces are easy to read and understand. The consumer has to cut all the materials out himself: the cards, the counters, and the cute little round arrows used to "tune" the dials on your console for shield strength and such. Cheaper, but you won't play within moments of opening the sturdy ziplock baggie it all comes in.

The graphics are gorgeous, being a fun mix of full-color printouts, playing mats, and cartoonish cards (88 of them) and counters. Even the sample maps and diagrams in the rules booklet are in full color. The cardstock used is firm and should hold up under play. It's all inexpensive stuff, but a whole lot of work went into it.

There are unfortunate shortcomings with the game. You can't decelerate, for one thing. This isn't a problem in and of itself, since by the time everyone ramps up to Speed 3 the race will be almost over anyway, but it is indicative of the game's deficits. There's no give and take in the game. You need a lot of the right cards or events to overcome another player's lead, it's difficult to impede his progress in any meaningful way, and the only benefit to being behind is the chance to use missiles. Even then, the missiles probably won't do your opponent in unless you get some high results. These are minor considerations, though, since more material has been promised (including hints of a round track, which would make lapping an opponent a critical judgment).

Another, fuller game (same rules, but more stuff) is due to be released, as are all manner of supplements. It's easy to see how the game can be updated and fitted out with homebrew rules and add-on material from HDI -- players will probably be making up their own new twists by the second or third go-round. *The Great Space Drag Race* is a fun, fast, and well-designed game with good play and an even better price tag. Should the supplements prove as beautifully done as the starter, it will be a game worth keeping up with.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Wake of the Comet (for Shadowrun)

Published by [FanPro LLC](#)

Written by **Brian Schoner, Michelle Lyons and Malik Toms, Davidson Cole, Andy Frades and Rich Tomasso**

Cover by **Marko Djurdjevic**

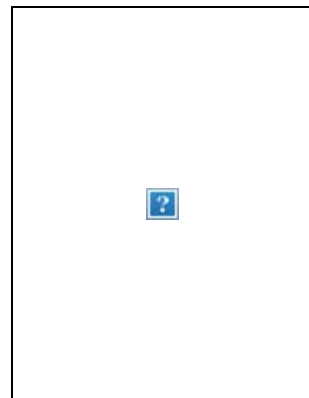
Illustrated by **Janet Aulisio, Doug Chaffee, Marko Djurdjevic, Larry MacDougall, Jim Nelson, RK Post, Steve Prescott and Roger Peterson**

84-page b&w softcover; \$19.95

Recent releases from FanPro have presented a great deal of new background for the *Shadowrun* setting. They have been keyed to one particular event, the visitation of Halley's Comet through our solar system and out again, as detailed in [Year of the Comet](#). Throughout 2061 and 2062, the comet becomes the focus of increased media attention and coverage as many of the Sixth World's corporations with space-based interests all enter the "Probe Race." The Ares Macrotechnology, Saeder-Krupp, Novatech, Proteus AG, Shiawase, Shibata Construction and Engineering, and Yamatetsu corporations all enter the race with Hisato-Turner, Trans-Orbital, and Federated Boeing as outside contenders. All hope to have their probe be the first to reach the comet and return its data, thus claiming the prestige of winning the race.

Yet, as detailed in *Year of the Comet*, each of the competitor's probe programs falls victim to sabotage, accident and mishap, all while the comet is still inbound. The prize is still within their grasp and they rush to get new or back-up probes prepared and launched so that they can catch Halley's Comet on its outbound track. This period is the time frame for *Wake of the Comet*, a trio of adventures that put the player characters in the middle of events surrounding the Probe Race's second wind and takes them across the Americas in the process. To get the fullest use out of *Wake of the Comet*, the *Shadowrun* GM will need the aforementioned *Year of the Comet*, while [Shadows of North America](#) will be useful upon the various nations of North America, and [Target: Wastelands](#) for its rules on surviving in dangerous climes. [Threats 2](#) may be useful in conjunction with *Shadows of North America*, but to a much lesser degree. The GM should also have the standard panoply of *Shadowrun* books and supplements to hand.

Brian Schoner's "The Messenger" is the first of the adventures and the simplest and most straightforward -- if not to say linear -- of the three. Rivalry between the designers of competing telemetry packages for Proteus AG's "Götterbote" (God-Messenger) probe provide the shadowrunners with their first job. All they have to do is kidnap and baby-sit one the designers until the probe has been launched, but this involves a trip to French Guiana and out to sea to the corporation's launch facility and arkoblock built across the three islands of Îles du Salut (Salvation Islands). One of the three also happens to be the Île du Diable or Devil's Island of Papillion and Captain Alfred Dreyfus fame, and although it has now been turned into the arkoblock's fitness center, the three islands are still unapproachable rocks without easy landing points sat in shark infested waters. This is not an adventure that will make much use of a decker, and it does involve a secret organization from the out of print supplement, *Threats*. Thankfully, this organization, "Winterbane" and its aims are summarized in its own piece of boxed text, but GMs will be at a loss if they want them to have a continuing presence in their campaign and they lack a copy of *Threats*. This is a possibility if the player characters thwart Winterbane's plans to use Götterbote to bring about Ragnarok and their post apocalyptic world domination. Certainly, they won't want to leave any traces of their plan behind and that includes stray shadowrunners.



The second scenario, "Catch A Falling Star," by Michelle Lyons and Malik Toms, sends the party off in search of a downed satellite. The only probe to reach the comet in 2061 is "Gagarin," launched by the Yamatetsu Corporation, but all contact was lost before any data could be returned. In 2062 limited contact was regained, but its status was uncertain and it looked as if it was going to return its data package to Earth in the wrong place. Yamatetsu decide to keep Gagarin's status a secret until they can get at the data it may have recorded, but other corporations have taken an interest in what they are hiding and the characters are hired to make a short run on a satellite uplink to steal this secret. With this in their employer's possession, the party is asked to do another job -- grab or even destroy the satellite's data package before anyone else can. Unfortunately it has come down in the middle of the Algonkian-Manitou Council civil war. The anti-technology, pro-meta-human Manitou tribe, as detailed in *Shadows of North America*, has seceded and the runners will need to cross a possibly hostile border and negotiate with representatives of the "rebel" forces. Yamatetsu also has a recovery team looking for the package and they will not be far behind . . .

"Catch A Falling Star" does not come with a set employer and the GM is given a long list of several to chose from. They include Ares, Aztechnology (who also provide security forces supporting operations against the Manitou rebels), Saeder-Krupp and Shiawase, all with their particular motivations and objectives. Other options are also discussed. The adventure takes the party into the heart of an the Algonkian-Manitou winter, and the GM will want the rules on cold climate survival and operations found in "The Ends of the Earth" chapter and Game Information section of *Target: Wastelands*.

After the cold of "Catch A Falling Star" and possible shark-infested dunking of "The Messenger," the third and final adventure takes the runners somewhere quite exotic. Written by Davidson Cole, Andy Frades, and Rich Tomasso, "The Price of Liberty" takes them into low Earth orbit and to the Apollo Station transport hub owned by Ares Macrotechnology. Using the rules in "Up The Gravity Well" in *Target: Wastelands*, the characters get a paid trip to the station where they must make an alteration to a communications relay. Only when they return to Earth do they learn that one of Ares' two back-up probes, "Velox I," has gone awry -- were they the ones responsible? Yet, before they have time to feel any guilt, their employer decides that he wants out from under his current bosses, and once out his bargaining chip is the future status of the second of Ares' back-up probes, "Velox II." This puts the characters in the midst of a high stakes auction, and if they can survive all of this big league showdown, they get to make a lot of Nuyen.

After playing through *Wake of the Comet*, both the GM and the player characters have the opportunity to influence the outcome of the events surrounding the Probe Race in the official Sixth World. At the back of the book is a form that asks the GM the outcome of the last two scenarios in the book when run as part of their campaign.

Wake of the Comet presents three solid scenarios that get the GM's game involved in the big events of the continuing *Shadowrun* storyline, much as was done with *Super Tuesday*. Yet it really does not make a great deal of use of the supplements that it draws from for its setting -- the "Return of the Comet" chapter from *Year of the Comet*, the "Up The Gravity Well" and "The Ends of the Earth" chapters from *Target: Wastelands*, and the Algonkian-Manitou Council chapter from *Shadows of North America*. This is a shame, especially so when the price of *Wake of the Comet* is considered -- 84 pages for \$19.99 in comparison to the 204 for the \$25.00 *Shadows of North America* or the 208 pages of *State of the Art: 2063* that also costs \$19.99. Had *Wake of the Comet* contained more pages, these would have been best devoted to adventures, or at least ideas built around the events described in FanPro's recent release of sourcebooks, including *Year of the Comet*, *Threats 2*, *Target: Wastelands*, and *Shadows of North America*.

The three scenarios in *Wake of the Comet* are likeable and present a solid challenge to any set of players, really getting them involved in the history of the game. Yet at the end, the book's short page count will not count in its favor.

--Matthew Pook

Not Giving Subgenres Das Boot (Part II)

Why, it seems like just a mere 168 hours ago when we were looking at crafting a world that could encompass many subgenres of a particular genre we were interested in exploring. For those of you who weren't with us last week, we *strongly* recommend you [check out our last installment](#).

So, then, without further ado, and to avoid further *columnus interuptus*, let's continue where we left off from last week. (Please address all Latin corrections to our Special Consultant on Language [J.R. "Bob" Dobbs](#).)

Five: Think *carefully* about the rules.

If you're using a pre-established set of game rules for a multi-subgenre game, you may not have rules necessary to encompass everything . . . meaning you'll need to make some up. This isn't necessarily a problem, but remember that a horribly conceived rule system may well create problems from the beginning, causing your players to hate you. (Er, maybe not *hate* you . . .) More generally, this is also the time to think, philosophically, about how you want the rules to affect the game.

Looking at our world again, we make some observations:

1. Some kind of "power" is necessary to fuel all the superheroic effects. Anything beyond normal human abilities draws upon this power, and when the power's gone, the person is normal again.
2. We probably want power, for the most part, to drain when away from the region that fuels them. We don't want the Gorgeous Seattleite to plop her butt down in Washington, D.C., indefinitely at full power and waiting.
3. Power probably drains at different rates, depending on the region.
4. We probably want powers to be free in their respective regions (or, depending on the system, to recharge normally). After all, characters in their "element" should be able to do what they'd normally expect to do.
5. For that matter, we probably want each region to have its own rules, just to keep things interesting. (We want to avoid going overboard, though, so we're not awash in fiddly bits.)

Looking at our list again, we jot some notes:

- **four-color high-power** -- Given how all-inclusive this genre is, we probably want folks from other regions to be pretty powerful here. (After all, giant robots are completely in keeping with the four-color experience.) But we don't want visitors to be *too* powerful . . . otherwise, they have no incentive to go back to their own regions. We come up with three possibilities: Visitors can recharge back up to the power they had when they *enter* the region (again, making geography a real concern); visitors can recharge up to a percentage of their power (say, 75%), meaning they can stick around, but they won't be as powerful; or visitors recharge up to their full amount, but it just happens slower than for residents of the four-color region. After some deliberation, we decide on the second option.
- **gritty mock realistic** -- At the other extreme we find the urban-level heroes. Visitors from other regions should probably find their abilities *drained* here. At this point it's probably useful to consider how fast such effects occur in terms of time . . . if we consider the most powerful defender of Seattle, how fast should he be drained in the gritty mock realistic world? After some thought we decide on four days; that allows for some extended adventures, while still ensuring others can't come in and take over the region. Plus the math is easy, too; lose 1/4 of the power each day, until normal on the fourth day. In keeping with the genre, we may make rules that allow *anyone* using certain abilities (mostly heightened skills) to regain the power expended normally.
- **magical heroes** -- Here we want visitors to be drained pretty quickly, since non-magical characters often tend to fare poorly against magical ones in the superhero comics. Here we decide that visitors will lose roughly half their power, although they can recharge up to that threshold. We also decide visitor power used in direct abilities against magical denizens of the region *add* the power used to the other (although a mighty attack may still be worthwhile) . . . if the Gorgeous Seattleite wants to use her sizzlebeams against The Ick, she may find her efforts make the thing *more* powerful! Of course, using her power to throw a building at it may still prove effective . . .

but, as ever, it's probably best to follow ally Arcain's lead and help him dispatch the villain.

- **technological heroes** -- Visitors will probably not be drained by themselves (although using their powers will still drain them), but their abilities will become more expensive. What's the difference? Well, visitors will also be able to use their power to fuel any of the technological marvels of the region . . . presuming they can acquire them. Thus other heroes can zoom around supercars or suits of armor as well . . . although their own abilities will suffer. Regeneration will be impossible for visitors, so if they *do* take one of the giant robots for a spin, it will need to be for a limited time.
- **martial artist action-hero type** -- Visitors are all drained to a threshold equal to the most powerful of the residents of this region. Regeneration is possible to *all* (up to that threshold), but is mostly reliant on highly cinematic deeds; the more outlandish the stunt, the more power that is regenerated. Thus highly kinetic characters of any region can be successful here, while more brooding or contemplative metahumans may find themselves out of juice in a hurry.
- **1950s and 1960s optimistic** -- The genre allows for *very* high-powered adventures, but -- for whatever reason -- nothing ever seems to happen permanently. We decide that visitors will be allowed to keep their full power, although no regeneration is possible. Visitors will also find themselves stymied by an undefined Law of Stability (which the residents take for granted): Each action beyond a certain power threshold will be met with resistance in some way, resulting in a (more or less) static world. Thus Madison may be besieged by a criminal with an animal-enlarging ray, but forces will probably act to keep him from causing *too* much damage. (By the same token, an attempt to make a permanent orbiting satellite in the region will result in something bad happening to it.) Mind you, the philosophers of the region -- if they make the leap to comprehend that there is this force -- may posit that the heroes *are* this instrument of stability. This rule also means it is *extraordinarily* difficult to kill someone through fantastic means, making the region a surprisingly safe (if very weird) place to live. The reason behind this Law may well be one of the long-term mysteries for the players to solve.
- **modern self-referential "normal" game** -- For these kind of stories, we want there to be a possible good number of heroes, but we don't want them to *do* much. We decide that residents find their abilities recharge at a *very* slow rate (for example, it may take a depleted hero a year to regenerate back to full strength). Visitors will find their abilities hacked to about 10% of their full potential, and they will find themselves unable to regenerate that power, *but* that power will remain in their system; it won't drain like in other regions. In one fell swoop, this gives other characters a reason to visit and stay. The region would make a perfect planning arena, vacation spot, retirement community . . . all ideal for the genre to be simulated.

We now have prototypes of all the rules in place. It will probably take some playtesting to make it work fully, and reminding the players that the rules may be tinkered with in actual gameplay is a good idea.

Step Six: Put it all together

At this point you can wrap the setting around whatever game history you decide upon, and do everything else necessary to bring the world alive. At this point the creation of the game world isn't that much different than any other campaign world, although having a good story as to *why* all these subgenres exist will probably be required. Depending on how your subgenres coexist, and what kind of back story mysteries you want there to be, you may want the subdivisions to be obvious or subtle. For example, if we *didn't* want players to investigate the background reasons behind subgenres, then we would make them as obvious or "natural" as possible; thus a multigenre *Car Wars* campaign may have parts of the world that are impoverished and underdeveloped -- allowing for a *Mad Max*-esque setting, while other parts are futuristic high tech that specialize only in racing, making for *Speed Racer*-style adventures, and still other parts are urban and heavily taxed, such that parts are much less expensive than whole cars, allowing for *Fast and the Furious*-type mods and kit-bashing action. By making this example tied to the history, the players will be less inclined to poke at hidden mysteries behind these subgenres than they would be were there simply "Mysterious Zones of Magically Transformed Gadgets Cars."

For our game world, though, we *want* those magical zones. So first we look to create some kind of [white event](#) that would explain the different regions.

In this case we draw upon our extensive comic collection and pick a nexus-point. We do this partly because self-

referential comic origins are pretty popular, and partly to tap said extensive comic collection, thus ensuring that our collection has been used for business purposes so we can deduct it from our upcoming 2001 federal taxes. (We may be drifting heavily into the "royal *we*" here . . .)

Anyway, we note that 1986 was an incredibly important year for comics, with a 50-year-old comic universe ending, a number of its most iconic characters redefined, and one of the most medium-redefining miniseries ever. We contemplate one theoretical comic collector: a young man with rich parents, a fatal condition (perhaps AIDS?), and unimaginable untapped potential and power . . . power that is stoked by the creatively rich era, yet power that goes untapped while he is alive. He dies, and his extensive collection is sold and split up across the world. The collector's raw power is somehow infused within his collection. Various buyers only purchase the genres that interest them, and the geographic locales of these comics form the basis for the zone within a year. (The comics in Denver are all privately held by one collector, explaining its tiny zone, while the comics in New England were purchased by one shop which primarily resold them to people within that region.) Of course, the world (and players) doesn't know any of this, but it can form a long-term mystery that may be revealed as the game progresses. (The nature of the collector and his exact powers are also nebulous enough that we can further refine and define them as the game progresses. Do the PC heroes take an intense liking to an altruistic NPC millionaire businessman? Well, it turns out he once had a very son who was very ill . . .) Finally, 1986/87 is long enough ago that we can have mature older teen heroes who have grown up entirely in a world populated with the various metahumans.

Our example may be pretty cheesy, but no more so than many comic origins, and it should be pretty [internally consistent](#). It also explains our various subgenres in a pretty tidy fashion.

Game on!

The game world beyond this shouldn't be much different than designing any other game world; you have your subgenres, your divisions, your rules, and your origins. If using a homebrew world or system, it would probably be wise to create a sample party that pushes the edges of the game world, and make sure the players will be able to be effective and have fun despite the different subgenres.

And if that doesn't work, [blow up the world](#) and try again . . . this time choosing another item that will enable large tax deductions (coming next week: a game world where all the heroes are pricy DVD boxed sets . . .).

* * *

Last week's answer: *Holodeck Adventures* (for the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game*, p. 11.

(Two stars) "My God, doctor! If Vapula's Hypermodulated Giant Transluminal Robot isn't stopped, it will crush Notre-Dame at noon tomorrow!"

Designer's Notes: GURPS WWII: Return to Honor

by Brian J. Underhill

Gene Seabolt and I first discussed *GURPS WWII: Return to Honor* in June 2001. Shortly thereafter, the project was passed on to another (unnamed) author and I began work on the British sourcebook, *All the King's Men*. It wasn't until March 2002 that Return to Honor was dropped back into my lap, together with a less-than-ideal six-week deadline. In addition, the original manuscript was written as a 32-page book, but between first and final draft, the decision was made to upgrade it to 48 pages.

Creating an accurate -- and enjoyable -- sourcebook in six weeks would have been hard enough, but expanding it to 150% of its original size was even harder. But thanks to some great work by Gene Moyers, Jeffery McGonagill, Gene Seabolt, Hans-Christian Vortisch, and others, the finished product is not only 50% larger than the initial work, but at least 50% better!

Morale and the Maginot

One of the toughest issues to address was France's lack of preparation for the German attack and the resulting routs in the spring of 1940. The value of the Maginot Line as a fortification has been argued ever since the war, but the reality is that Germany simply by-passed the line in an end-run that caught everyone by surprise.

Was the Maginot Line a waste of time and money? Could it have withstood an assault by the Wehrmacht? Those are questions better left for an alternate-history worldbook. The fact is that the Maginot Line helped create a false sense of security (the Maginot mentality) in French citizens, soldiers, and politicians, that slowed response times and was at least partially responsible for the apparent lack of offensive action on the part of the French.

A second problem facing the French army was lack of morale and a lack of willingness to become involved in another bloody, drawn-out war such as they had seen a generation before. Official French military doctrine proposed hunkering down and defending tenaciously rather than taking the fight to the Germans. But such a static defense would prove useless against the rapidly moving German forces, and French soldiers quickly surrendered when faced with onrushing tanks and screaming Stukas. A flood of refugees choked French troop movements, and the German advance was so rapid that no one seemed to know where the front was at any given moment.

Rommel's 7th Panzer Division -- called the "Ghost Division" because of its sudden and unexpected appearances -- roared through the countryside surprising barracks of resting French soldiers, overrunning retreating French units, and terrifying French refugees.

Deep behind the so-called "Front," Rommel was approached by a villager who patted his arm, smiling:

"Are you English?" she asked, apparently pleased to see the armored division in her hometown.

"No, Madam," Rommel replied. "I am German."

"Oh!" The village women shrieked, fleeing Rommel's side. "The barbarians!"

Besides being an amusing anecdote, the above illustrates the confusion surrounding the rapid German advance, and helps explain the French reaction to the Battle of France.

One of the most difficult things about writing *Return to Honor* was to capture the attitudes and atmosphere of that period without implying that French soldiers were cowardly or lazy. Their lack of morale stemmed from poor training and an unwillingness to repeat the bloody trench warfare of 1914-1919. And the fear the onrushing German army came from self-preservation, not cowardice. Still, the fact remains that the majority of the French units broke quickly during

those bleak spring days of 1940; a fact that has been excused, explained, justified, and even re-written in the sixty years since.

Capturing these moments in a roleplaying supplement, however, was a singularly difficult task. But after extensive playtesting, editing, and rewriting, it's my hope that the facts speak for themselves. I believe that the heroism of the French armies throughout the war makes it clear that it was the circumstances of the battle -- not the men involved in it -- that resulted in the tragic defeat in 1940. As the book's title indicates, France was able to return to the honor she once had -- a task that would have been impossible without the heroic determination of the Free French soldiers, resistance operatives, stalwart civilians, and unwavering leadership.

In the end, I hope *Return to Honor* provides GMs and players with an abundance of information for many hours of gaming. From the start of the phony war to the liberation of Paris, adventures galore await those willing to aid France in her Return to Honor . . .

France, September 1939

The French 2nd Army Group makes contact with the German 1st Army during Operation Saar. The PCs become separated from their unit and wind up behind the German lines. How much havoc can this handful of men wreak on the German 1st before their spotted? Will they be able to make it back to the safety of France before it's too late?

Dunkirk, June 1940

PCs attached to the French XVI Corps are ordered to defend Dunkirk, allowing the evacuation of Allied troops from the beleaguered port. On June 4, 1940, the evacuation is complete and the XVI Corps surrenders. Will the PCs become prisoners of war, or will they continue to fight as part of the early French resistance?

Algeria, Summer 1940

Members of the French Foreign Legion in Algeria receive news of the signing of the Armistice. They are ordered to surrender their weapons to Germany on demand, and to fight for the Vichy and Nazi forces against their own comrades if need be. Will the PCs side with the new Vichy government or will they choose to side with the "rebel" Charles de Gaulle and his new Forces Françaises Libres? Which choice makes them a traitor, and which makes them a patriot? And above all, how will the rest of the unit react to the PCs' choice?

Oran, July 1940

When British Force H arrives at the French port of Mers-el-Kébir, French sailors suddenly find themselves in a heated naval battle against their one-time allies. When their ship is badly damaged or sunk, how will the PCs deal with being prisoners of the British navy? Will they continue to fight bravely, or try and convince the Brits to let them join up?

Paris, October 1940

A recently recruited Resistance operative is approached by German officials, aware of his recent clandestine activities. Through hints and veiled threats, they "suggest" he begin working for them as a double agent, lending his support to the true French regime in Vichy rather than fighting against his own country. Will the character agree to act as a double agent, or blatantly turn them down? Will he report the incident to the Allies? Will he be called on to act as a triple agent? What will other PCs (or NPCs) do when they find out he is in contact with the Vichy government?

Libya, May 1942

German and Italian forces have surrounded a mixed contingent of French troops at Bir-Hakeim. The French commander, General Marie-Pierre Koenig, is proposing a daring breakout, but he needs stalwart French volunteers to

scout the German emplacements. That night's trip into the rocky desert becomes a nightmare of hide-and-seek games, skirmishes, and all out firefights against a force of superior size. Then a gaping hole in the German lines is discovered! Will any of the PCs make it back to report the weakness to Koenig before it's too late?

France, June 1944

French resistance agents receive a signal from the BBC that marks the beginning of Operation Overlord. The night before the invasion, the PCs are assigned to destroy the telegraph lines outside a nearby city -- a simple, but important task. Before they can complete their assignment, they are spotted by a German patrol and pinned down in the bombed out rubble of an old library. Surrounded and outgunned, they must use their wits and their guts to accomplish their mission before daybreak.

A Thread Winding Backwards

by Steven Marsh

"A Thread Winding Backwards" is a Super-Horror adventure seed. By its nature it is rather generic, and will require fleshing out by the GM. It is designed for any number of heroes, although only one hero will be the "target"; in this way it could make an especially good one-on-one adventure. Ideally the target hero will be someone who has a well-defined moral code, preferably with a strong sense of responsibility. The typical "truth, justice, and freedom" superhero will work fine here.

Challenges will need to be developed appropriate to the hero team. This adventure presumes your standard lower-powered street level heroes, such as the Teen Titans or the Fantastic Four.

This adventure asks the basic question, "What if, in your attempts to do good, you were actually doing evil?"

This adventure probably works best if spread out over multiple sessions, interspersed between other adventures; the horrific elements then have a chance to build on each other, and elements that elicit the pondering, "That's on odd coincidence . . ." can build to a greater crescendo. The plot involved is relatively intricate and the entity behind it can be patient.

Act One -- Blast from the Past

One or more of the heroes are -- presumably in their private identities -- enjoying cappuccino at Java Compliant, a trendy local coffee shop. (If none of the heroes would seem interested in attending such a place themselves, perhaps an NPC friend or romantic interest dragged them there.) It's a cozy, quiet moment, even though the place is bustling with a noon-day crowd.

Suddenly someone enters the shop. With a machine gun. And opens fire.

Emphasize the randomness and (especially) speed of the situation. If the heroes are in a secret identity, they will need to balance between resolving the situation and keeping their secret.

It is up to the GM how bloody (or not) he wants to make this encounter. It can either be a grim -- but almost victimless -- foreshadowing of events to come, or it can be an exceptionally violent, tragic, and seemingly senseless crime. Regardless, when it seems like the heroes will be able to stop the assailant, he (or she) will turn the gun around and pull the trigger. (GMs should take strong efforts to avoid the attacker being captured, but it isn't essential.)

In the aftermath, one fact will eventually come to light: The person who committed this crime is the first person whose life the "target" hero ever saved!

How this is discovered is up to the GM, and the heroes. If a hero is of the super-perceptive variety, has an eidetic memory, or otherwise keeps tabs on those whose lives he's touched, he may recognize the person as soon as they enter the shop. Otherwise he may be able to find the person's wallet -- complete with several forms of ID -- and run the information through his computer records, personal journals, or other notes. If all fails, the press will almost certainly be able to determine the significance of the assailant (since the first person who was saved by a new superhero would almost certainly talk to the press) Such a revelation by the press will take at least a day or two, although if the heroes have press connections -- or research themselves -- they will find the connection sooner . . . and without it being a front page item (yet).

Again, the GM should pace the game to emphasize the horrific aspect of the crime, and the pull of duties (especially on the target hero). If they didn't reveal their heroic identities, then the police will almost certainly want to talk to them

Research, Research

when they arrive. But that will keep the heroes tied up for a while, when they will most likely want to investigate immediately. If they leave the crime scene to investigate the matter, make sure the police track down their civilian identities, wanting to interview them (no doubt at an inopportune moment).

Once the heroes know the identity of the shooter, they will probably want to investigate the matter. If they do, they will discover that he didn't show up for work today (or, if the person is jobless, wasn't seen at their usual haunts). They will discover that he also killed his family (if he has one) with the same weapon.

Deeper investigation will reveal (to clever heroes) the following interesting pieces of information:

The shooter was wearing the same clothes he was seen in the day before.

The shooter did not have a vehicle at the scene of the crime. (This could be unusual depending on the city, whether or not he has or should have a vehicle, etc.) No level of investigation will discover his whereabouts that day prior to the shooting.

All research among friends, coworkers, extended family, and so on will indicate that the shooter was not acting unusual in the days prior to the shooting. (Although a cruel GM *may* throw in a witness with an overactive imagination, a desire for the spotlight, or other issues . . .)

This information should only be revealed if characters are persistent, resourceful, and perhaps a bit lucky (and the GM lets it be discovered). It does give some information that all may not be as it seems, which may affect the horror aspects.

Act Two -- Fresh Paint, Fresh Blood

Some time later (in a dramatically appropriate amount of time; see below), the target hero -- and possibly the rest of the party -- is asked to dedicate a new civic project, the Mary Cassel Children's Recreational Facility, and make a speech. This multi-million dollar building is designed to give underprivileged children a safe place to play and learn after school before they go home. All goes according to plan -- speeches are given, the ribbon is cut, photos are taken -- until all of the lights in the building go out. (This is immediately noticeable from outside in front of the building, and would cause quite a ripple from the press.)

Whether the heroes investigate or leave it to the mundane authorities is up to the players. Regardless, any mundane attempts to restore power will fail. Either the electricians or the heroes will learn that the problem seems to be stemming from the electrical junction box in the maintenance room of the basement. Whoever investigates will discover that the backup generators have been shut down as well; regardless of who is exploring, emphasize the darkness and mysteriousness of exploring a brand-new building. The smell of paint and new fixtures is everywhere, and flashlights or other light sources (if used) will illuminate none of the usual signs of life.

As the investigators approach the maintenance room that houses the electrical equipment, they will hear a steady drip, drip, drip. Entering the room will reveal a body strung up to the ceiling overhead, gutted and bleeding in a puddle below him. The body belongs to Elmore Jackson, the maintenance worker who was assigned to the building and charged with making sure the final custodial bits necessary to open the building were done. Investigators will notice footprints leading from the puddle out of the room; they end about fifty feet later in the darkened corridor, the shoes having run out of blood to mark.

In a superheroic game based on the player's original creations, it will be up to the GM to determine who that "first saved" is. (This is one of those situations where excellent note-taking pays off, especially when it comes to super games that began with the actual origin of the hero in question.) But in a game where the players are using established heroes, there may well be actual characters and incidents that can be referenced. A good candidate for the Batman, for example, would be the homeless woman he saved whom Lieutenant Gordon almost accidentally ran over (*Batman: Year One*, p. 42). For Superman it would probably be one of the crew members of the space-plane Constitution (*Superman: The Man of Steel*, p. 23). A little research here will go a long way toward making this adventure "real" for the players.

By this point the scene depends on who went to deal with the problem. The one behind the murder is another early person the victim hero saved; he is hiding in the dark corridors, hoping to ambush other authorities. If the heroes are the ones who are exploring the dark (as is expected), the situation will resolve quickly; one mortal, no matter how crazy, is almost no match for one superhero. On the other hand, if the mundane authorities entered the situation, it could turn ugly quickly; the killer may well take out one or more of them, and will probably be seriously injured or killed in the resulting scuffle.

Regardless, the situation will play out roughly the same as Act One; the shooter doesn't seem to have any real means of getting there, he is dressed the same as he was yesterday, friends and family agree he was acting no differently, and so on.

Act Three -- Investigation

By this point the heroes should be concerned. Depending on the methods used, an investigation will turn up some curious facts:

- Many of the people the target hero have saved in the past are unavailable currently, or their whereabouts are unknown.
- Most of the cities where those people live have had a rash of unusual murders and violent crimes today; in some cases those previously saved people are implicated in those crimes, or otherwise wanted for questioning.

This phase of the adventure can last as long as is dramatically appropriate; the players (and especially the target hero) need to become aware that either all of their past good deeds seem to be unraveling, or worse, their past good deeds seem to have sown the seeds for some greater evil which is brewing. (And, yes, they should get the sense that something is brewing . . .)

Act Four -- Interlude

While the heroes are still investigating this matter, their help is requested; one of the low-income high-rise buildings in the city has caught fire, and the authorities are worried that it may spread to the adjoining tenements if not resolved quickly.

This should play out as a standard opportunity for the heroes to do good; all the heroes should have an opportunity to be heroic, battle the fire, and save lives. But the target hero will find himself faced with a rescue of his own; a man and wife in one of the top floors require saving (in whatever way the hero would be likely to use). Upon rescuing them, however, the rescued couple goes berserk, attacking anyone in the crowd with whatever means they can (punching, biting, grabbing a fireman's axe or policeman's gun, and so on). Emphasize the chaos of this situation; while the fire is still out of control, the heroes will need to decide how they are going to handle two people in a crowd (make sure the heroes are aware that any area or burst affects they might use will almost certainly hit innocent civilians).

Once the situation is under control, the heroes can investigate how they will with the two who went insane; again, the information will be similar to that gained from earlier victims . . . which is to say, not much. (For added dramatic effect, one of the couple might be one of the mundane authorities from the Act Two, if the heroes left investigating the blackout to them.) If the heroes haven't put the pieces together now, a nearby reporter may ask the target hero, "Is it true that everyone you have saved is turning into a maniacal killer?"

What The Sam Scratch Is Going On?

This entire plot has been orchestrated by one deeply evil entity, who is called The Adversary for the purposes of this adventure. (In established superheroic game worlds there are a myriad of possibilities for who this might be; in the Marvel universe Mephisto is an obvious choice, while in the DC universe Neron is a possibility. Regardless, if there is an actual dark spiritual adversary within the campaign universe, then he or one of his associates is an obvious choice;

this is especially true if the being in question is the typical "pact-with-the-devil" type of deceptive bargainer.)

The Adversary has a multitude of tainted powers; for the purposes of this adventure, the only ones we really care about are an ability to catch glimpses of time (the past and future) and the ability to make the target hero's past beneficiaries attack (or seem to attack; see Resolution, below).

The Adversary has many powers, but one he most certainly does not have is the ability to make people act against their own free will. He can trick them into acting a certain way, he can cause pain, he can threaten, but ultimately the choice comes down to the person he is targeting.

He has witnessed someone who (for the purposes of our adventure) is called the Beacon. The Adversary knows that, in some time soon, the Beacon will play a crucial role in thwarting a supernatural threat that would otherwise greatly benefit the Adversary. He also knows that sometime very soon the Beacon will be placed in harm's way, with the target hero acting to save him.

The future is always malleable and ever-changing, but the Adversary knows that, if he can get the target *not* to save this person, then his death will greatly sway the forthcoming event in his favor. To that end, he has used his ability to view time to catch key moments in the target hero's life . . . specifically relating to those he has saved. The Adversary has plotted that if he can make the target hero doubt his own abilities and his drive to save innocents at just the right time, he may be able to keep the hero from saving the Beacon's life. Since the Beacon is too pure and strong of soul to be directly hurt by the Adversary, this is probably his best chance to be rid of this future problem.

The Adversary has thus used his other abilities to make the hero's past rescues attack (or appear to attack) other innocent people.

All of this is leading up to Act Five.

Act Five -- The Decision

Before or about this time it is important for the target hero to have doubts about his actions. As such, similar scenes to those of Act Three and Four can be inserted here if the hero still feels too cocky. (Of course, after a certain amount of time if the player or character *still* doesn't feel any doubts, it's probably best to wrap the adventure up. There's no sense in beating a dead plot horse and dragging out a nonworking storyline too long.)

At this time, the heroes get word that a canister of deadly sarin nerve gas has broken inside the local hospital, endangering all those inside. (Of course, this is assuming the heroes can respond to such a threat; feel free to lower -- or raise! -- the difficulty depending on the campaign power level.) Again, the heroes will find they have plenty to do, although the action should work toward separating the target hero from the rest of the party.

Soon, the threat is contained to all except one room, where the target hero sees a patient recovering from surgery following a car accident earlier in the day; this is Ronald Stewart, who is the Beacon (although he doesn't know it yet). All the evidence points to the fact that the patient will soon be exposed to the gas, and the hero faces the choice: Does he save him? As he is deliberating, a reporter has barged past the cleanup crews and targeted the hero: "Are you going to save that man? Are you willing to take responsibility for what he does when he kills people?" and so on. (This reporter is either the Adversary in disguise, or someone the Adversary is controlling.)

Hopefully the hero will remain true to his ideals and decide, indeed, to save the injured man, whose eyes will seem to glow for a second before setting down; "Thank you," will be all he says with a smile.

After rescuing him, the Adversary will contact the hero in some dramatically appropriate way (either via his mind, or physically if the target hero is alone). "You may have won this round," he will say, anger dripping off his voice, "but you've only ensured that I will make your misery that much greater in the very near future . . ." He will then disappear (perhaps after angrily answering a question or two from the hero about what his evil-yet-somehow-fallible plan was).

If the hero does *not* save the man, he will die. In this case, the Adversary will contact the hero in a similarly dramatic fashion and say, "So many people counted on the strength of your soul . . . yet I alone saw it as but the fragile shell it truly is . . ." He will then gloat, also while answering a question or two for the hero.

Regardless of the outcome, after this incident the hero should have the idea that this *was* an elaborate trick, and he should come away with this adventure with a sense that he should, indeed, be able to do good. But regardless, the threat of some greater battle should loom on the horizon . . .

Aftermath

The outcome of this adventure depends on how horrific and affecting the GM wants to make it. There are three general options here:

- **The previously saved victims-turned-killers were exactly what they seemed.** This is the darkest of the three options, and provides for the most horrific options. On the other hand, it's also the one the players are most likely to revolt against; having many of their past actions turn out to be moot (or worse) can make some players deeply resentful. Regardless of the outcome, the Adversary's ruse should be revealed to be exactly that, so the target hero can resume being heroic without *too* much fear . . .
- **The previously saved victims-turned-killers were not what they seemed, but their victims were real.** This is a moderately horrific option; the victims-turned-killers are actually demons, agents of the Adversary, the Adversary himself in disguise, or so on. However, the people he killed or otherwise affected *were* real. This option keeps the hero's history intact, while increasing the danger and ramifications of this deadly ruse.
- **The previously saved victims-turned-killers were not what they seemed, and neither were their victims.** In many superheroic universes, the person who plays the Adversary role can never take a life directly; he can trick people into damning themselves, or otherwise convince them to make bad decisions, but for the most part his powers are entirely illusory. This is the most superheroic of the options, and the one most like that which would be found in mainstream comics. However, it is also a fairly light ending to an otherwise very dark adventure; if that fits the tone of your campaign then great, but keep in mind that it can be difficult to ever establish a *truly* horrific adventure once a near-horrific adventure was presented with an entirely happy ending.

Obviously some combination of these techniques can be used; for example, perhaps one or two of the hero's rescues were corruptible, but the bulk of the effects needed to be done through illusions and trickery.

Epilogue

Obviously there are numerous threads to follow after this adventure. The primary one is the epic combat where the Adversary and the Beacon will play key roles; this is almost certainly a perfect "ultra-heroic" plot, the kind of which you might find in a summer crossover event. (Of course, the timing for this event may be *well* into the future, and the threat that it may come to be can keep the heroes guessing for quite some time.)

Beyond that, the heroes will need to clean up the pieces from the myriad of attacks, including repairing the city, his reputation, the lives that the Adversary destroyed, and so on. Helping to revisit those the target hero saved before can be a good way to reestablish exactly why a hero is doing what he's doing; seeing how many threads would have been cut short without his intervention is a good way of restoring the hero's strength of purpose, regardless of how horrific (or not) the adventure turns out to be. The hero has faced some of the worst the world could throw at him, including an attack on his own soul. And, when that thread was unwound, hopefully his own heroics was at the core.

Blood Magic in GURPS

by George Tucker

Blood magic is an ancient form of spellcasting. It is or has been practiced nearly universally, but is also regarded as backwards and bestial by most. Put in its simplest form, the caster uses HT instead of ST to cast spells -- the caster wounds himself with a ritual knife or other weapon.

Because of the inherent power of blood magic, magicians using it to power spells can ignore the restrictions of local mana, and the Magery prerequisite for spells. For these reasons, blood magic may be the only source of magic in a hidden- or low-magic campaign.

Blood Mages

Young blood mages normally show an intense fascination with blood. They often bite themselves, or deliberately cut themselves -- anything to revel in that powerful liquid. For these reasons, young blood mages are often institutionalized by concerned parents (in our modern world), exorcised by a priest/ess (in more superstitious worlds), or dedicated to the gods of death and disease. NPC blood mages will often have the Bloodlust (if not Sadism) disadvantage, along with negative Appearance due to scarring, Odious Personal Habit, Reputation, Social Stigma, or Secret. Blood mages are never without a dagger or scalpel, or, in an emergency, a razor blade or even a piece of glass. An old blood mage will be a palimpsest of scars, and easily identifiable.

Despite these drawbacks, blood magic is so inherently powerful that it allows characters to cast spells having a prerequisite of Magery *whether or not the character has Magery*. In a world where blood magic is the only form of magic, a blood mage should take the 35-point version of the advantage (below).

Generally, blood mages travel with a first-aid kit. See p. B-130 sidebar for the effects of open wounds.

Any wizard will be able to determine if another wizard is a blood mage from his aura -- those who practice blood magic are haloed in fiery scarlet.

The Rules

All spells the mage cast take at least one extra second to complete, more if the mage doesn't have an edged weapon ready (GM's decision).

The caster must make a Will roll in order to use himself as a power source, unless he has High Pain Threshold. If the cost of the spell is 4 or more, the roll is at -2. If the cost of the spell is 8 or more, the roll is at -5. Note that if the caster allows someone else to wound him to power the spell, the Will rolls still apply -- and on a failed roll, the caster will attempt to dodge his ally's blow.

The caster then rolls versus his skill with the attempted spell (or at IQ+Magery-3 for the 35-point advantage). A failed attempt has the normal results -- but not only is the mage still wounded, he must roll vs. his Surgery or weapon skill (DX-2 for non-weapons) or lose an additional hit point.

Blood magic cannot be used to cast Blocking spells or any other spells the GM deems off-limits.

After any spell-casting that costs the caster 5 or more hit points, he must roll vs. HT or lose one level of Appearance.

Being stabbed by someone else. A blood mage sometimes relies on a companion to do the knife work. Any time this happens, the character wounding the mage must roll vs. Surgery, Physician-1, or weapon skill-2 to avoid causing the

normal amount of damage to the mage with the weapon. Discriminating blood mages prefer skilled doctors as companions, for multiple reasons.

Can I save my own blood up, or use someone else's blood? No. A great deal of the power of blood magic comes from the psychic energy generated by the caster wounding himself. Raiding your local Red Cross and dumping three pints of blood on the ground just doesn't have the same power (nice try, though).

Blood Magic In The Campaign

Blood magery is easily adapted to any magic system. The concept and the drama is much more important than game mechanics, and, at the GM's whim, hit points can be exchanged for magical power at a greater or lesser rate.

In a world where magic is extremely rare, blood magic can be brought onstage to demonstrate the wages of dealing with such powers. Or in a world where Magery is common, blood magic could be the only tool available to the "mundanes" to combat sorcery. At the GM's whim, blood magic could be the only technique for casting certain spells (the Healing and Necromancy colleges come to mind), and any warlock worth his salt will be conversant in its techniques. But nothing will make a mage think twice about casting a spell faster than the gleam on the edge of his ritual knife. . .

Blood magic can be a tool for the GM who is creating a world that has fewer mages, with more modest powers (imagine enchanting an item with this method!). Or practitioners of bloodletting could have their own guilds side-by-side with traditional Hermetic-type mages. In a fantasy campaign, all blood mages could belong to a certain race, or family bloodline. Blood magery can be considered a blessing or a curse.

In an occult or horror campaign, blood magic can be another dark weapon the PCs can learn to wield. Play up the dramatic aspects, and the difficulties of *hurting* one's self badly.

Imagine a world where magic exists, but power is only generated by injuring one's self. Perhaps further mutilation (cutting off a hand, putting out the eyes. . .) would create magics of incredible power -- or, the only method of creating powerful magical items.

NPC blood mages are liable to be a surly and secretive lot. Highly recommended are: Odious Personal Habit (Intensity, Bad Smell, and so on), Bloodlust, Reputation, Secret (Black Magician or Blood Mage), Unluckiness, Visions, Voices (p. VO56), Weirdness Magnet, negative Appearance (scars), Enemy, Murder Addiction (Voodoo p.99) and anything else the GM can think of.

Advantages

Blood Magery

15, 20, or 35 points

The talent of channelling energy released by wounding one's self. The cost is, at the GM's discretion, 15 points on a world where magic is common, or 20 points where magic is rare. If Blood Magery is combined with the Natural Spellcasting advantage, the total cost is 35 points. Note that the blood mage with this 35-point advantage does not get to specify the *spell* he will cast, merely its *effects*. (See p. WW58-59 for details.)

Because blood mages are accustomed to pain, they only suffer half the shock penalties for injuries (see p. B-126-127), and can take High Pain Threshold for only 5 points.

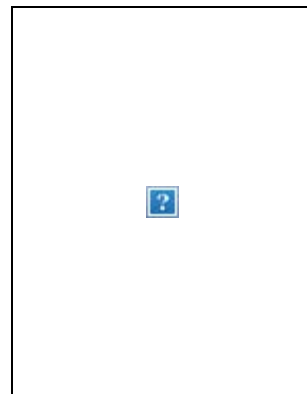
Pyramid Pick

Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game

Published by [Eden Studios](#)

Designed by C.J. Carella

256-page full-color hardback; \$40.00



Now in its seventh season, the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television show has been a favorite in the "gaming demographic" -- science-fiction and fantasy fans, mostly young, mostly male -- you know, geeks. There are Buffy fans outside the gaming demographic, to be sure, but among gamers, Buffy is an iconic pop culture figure, right up there with Xena and Picard and that guy on *Babylon 5* played by Bruce Boxleitner.

So after six-plus seasons, you know who Buffy is. And I don't have to tell you that it's this extremely cool show that's part comedy, part horror, part action-adventure, and (big) part soap opera, where the monsters and the demons and the vampires are all just metaphors for the trials and tribulations of high school (and life beyond). That, and the writing's pretty snappy, too. You've seen the show -- many of you are fans to one degree or another. So we can move on and talk about the game.

The game kicks off by . . . talking about the TV show. Plot synopses of the first five seasons follow the obligatory attempt to explain what roleplaying is and what all the participants actually do, and then it's off to the meat. The *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game* is 256 pages of hardbound, full-color gaming goodness from Eden Studios. Eden has a game system that works pretty well, the *Unisystem* they developed for games such as *Witchcraft*, *Armageddon* (not out yet), and *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*. I like the system a great deal, especially this pared-down version C.J. Carella produced for *Buffy*. There's no illusion here about gearing a roleplaying game for beginners, but Carella and Eden figured out early on there was a chance to rope in more than a few newcomers with a hot license like this, so the complexity of the system has been scaled way back. There are a grand total of 18 skills in the game, and it covers everything (everything that happens in a *Buffy* TV episode, anyway). There are the usual six attributes, though Perception is broken out separately from Intelligence, Wisdom becomes Willpower, and there is no Charisma. Qualities and Drawbacks handle the advantage/disadvantage part of character creation, and a fairly large number of combat maneuvers round out character creation, as befits a game based on a show with everything from kick-boxing to crossbows, swords to military-grade tasers.

Combat is quick, mostly because of very different power levels among the characters. The Slayer is, well, the Chosen One -- the one girl in all the world with the power to defeat the vampires, yadda yadda yadda. She's tough. Other good guys come in White Hats (well-meaning and with useful skills, but needing a lot of rescuing in a fight -- think early-seasons Willow, Xander, and just about everybody else who wasn't Buffy), Heroes (competent and dangerous -- think Giles), and Experienced Heroes (nearly the Slayer's equal -- think Angel, or Riley). The Slayer against a typical vampire (or two, or five) is a mismatch. One tough vampire (early Spike) could tear through a half-dozen White Hats. Fights between evenly-matched opponents can take a bit longer, but the system is quick, and you don't spend a lot of time figuring out your next die roll.

The only thing that saves the White Hats of the world is Drama Points, a system that lets you reduce your overall damage taken by half, or add +10 to a crucial die roll, or even get a lucky coincidence to save your bacon (your character foolishly walks into a four-vamp ambush while heading home alone one night, when -- suddenly -- Angel appears and scares them off). White Hats get more Drama Points than the tough characters, and can replenish them more cheaply, too. Judicious use of Drama Points, plus combat maneuvers like Full Defense, can keep a White Hat alive along enough for the Slayer to come bail him out -- pretty much the way it works on TV.

After describing the good guys, character creation, and combat, the bad guys get their turn. Every sort of villain from the show is described, from the ever-present vampire low-lives to various demons, robots, werewolves, ghosts, much bigger vampires, really humongous vampires, and other various Big Bads. The fictional Sunnydale, CA, gets its own chapter, too, with descriptions of all the major (and a lot of the minor) hangouts and hideouts. A lot of supporting characters get full descriptions here, too, like Amy Madison, Joyce Summers, Principals Flutie and Snyder, and lots of other folks. Even if they don't end up playing the game, fans of the TV show will enjoy the sourcebook-style information on everybody's favorite demon-infested party town.

At every turn, the designer's choices in putting together the *Buffy* RPG are based entirely on what will best emulate the television show. And Carella did a great job. If you're thinking of breaking the mold of the TV show and going off in too bold a direction, be warned -- this game is probably not for you. The game is designed for people who want to play in this world and have adventures like the TV show, not people who want to drop in and trash the place. For example, magic works a very specific way in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, namely slowly. Lots of research, lots of rituals, and spells that are usually cast only once and never cast again. The magic system gives you a good framework for designing your own spells, and enough sample spells (including examples from the show) to get anybody started. But if you're looking for a fireball-lobbing, magic missile-blasting, meteor-swarmed artillery platform instead of a devoted, studious practitioner of the arcane arts, you're in the wrong game.

Similarly, while the campaigns chapter of the book offers many different ways to get into the *Buffy* universe and play, none of them involve playing the bad guys. There may not be a Slayer in your group -- heck, you may just be a bunch of White Hats with no training and just the slightest inkling that something weird is going on -- but you definitely play the good guys. Other elements that are heavily emphasized in the TV show, like relationships and witty wordplay, also get extensively covered in the book.

Can you play the actual TV characters? Absolutely, and complete character sheets are provided for nearly all the major players of the first five seasons. (No Faith, though -- I think they're holding off on her for the *Slayer's Handbook* supplement . . .) And I've played convention demo games where we were all "name" characters, and we had a great old time. But playing your own group of original characters (including your own Slayer) sounds like more long-term fun to me. The character creation section includes 12 archetypes, ready-to-go character types that can be played as is, or customized to your preferences. They include the Football Player, New Slayer, Hacker, Beginner Witch, Former Initiative Agent, and more.

The witty wordplay may be the hardest to pull off. As the book itself reminds us, the cast members of the TV show have a team of highly talented (and well-paid) professional Hollywood scribes tossing off their snappy comebacks and endearing Buffyspeak. Helpfully, there's an actual (brief) section on Buffyspeak in the book, complete with examples and a glossary. Plus, there are loads of quotes from the first five seasons of the show, usually two or three to a page.

Another bonus to getting into the *Buffy* mood is the excellent writing from C.J. Carella. There's a light, conversational style that is absolutely perfect for conveying the mood you should be in to stay true to the source material when you play. Bonus props to Eden for getting tons of great photos direct from the TV show, which are used in over 90% of the book. Some Christopher Shy and rk Post art fills out the rest. The layout is wonderful, the use of color and graphics excellent throughout (no surprise -- George Vasilakos is one of the best), and the charts, tables, and character sheets are all excellent.

Can you play this game if you're *not* a *Buffy* fan? Sure you could. If you for some reason never got into the show and don't know that much about it, you could still have a fine old time, though it would help if the Director (yeah, they stick with TV metaphors throughout -- the GM is a Director, a campaign is a Season, individual sessions are Episodes, that sort of thing) knew the Buffyverse pretty well. And if you are an active non-fan of the show, you probably won't have any fun playing a game that does such a good job of emulating it (and there's very little chance you've actually made it to this point in the review).

But for fans of the show, this is a great book well worth picking up, and a game well worth playing. Sharpen up your stakes, Slayers -- the Hellmouth awaits!

-- *Scott D. Haring*

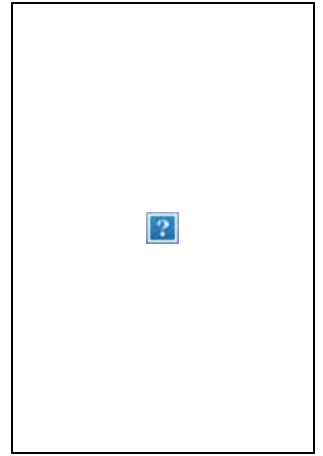
Pyramid Pick

Freeloader Board Game

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

Art by Cheyenne Wright



54 b&w cards and six board sections; \$7.50

Where James Ernest got the idea gamers would like to play layabouts making a living off other people is a complete mystery, but that's the premise of the Cheapass game *Freeloader* ("a game for 3-6 losers"). The object is to get the most points by trading favors to the folks who live in a little neighborhood in exchange for stuff you can borrow -- and which you will return Real Soon Now. With everyone mooching off the same people, it's a race to see who can be the most popular and squid the most stuff.

The game board is a set of six houses laid out in a ring; spaces in front of each house connect to make a circular route. In front of each house is a face-up card with an item on it: Food, Clothing, Shelter, or Finer Things. The rest of the cards sit in the middle, waiting to be drawn. Players move their tokens (which you must supply) around the inside of this circle, trying to get cards and play them from their hand into their Stuff pile. You can only play a card if you can afford the cost in favors -- those little things you do for your rich friends that make you a barely tolerable nuisance (like walk their dog).

Each turn, you get one action: place a favor, move, draw a card, or play a card. Placing a favor is easy -- just take your token (you have to provide these, too -- about 30 per player) and put it in one of the houses. If the Best Friend space is open, you can place your favor there, and this may cheapen the cost of playing some cards. You can also place it on the Crash Space; this means they're willing to let you stay there, which is important when qualifying for victory. Having multiple favors is not only a bonus (see below), it's necessary if you want to borrow the really nice stuff.

If someone else is the house owner's Best Friend, you can try to take that title for yourself. If you challenge them and they refuse to budge, you each roll a six-sider (you guessed it -- provide those yourself as well, moocher). Multiply the result by the number of favors you have in the house, and the winner is the new Best Friend. The other guy must lose a favor from that house as punishment.

Move means you roll dice. You can roll one or two dice, depending on whether you're hoping to land close by or you want to make some serious time toward a particular residence (you can move faster still with some items, like when you borrow a car). When you land on a space, you follow the instructions. This may let you place more favors, steal Stuff from in front of another player, crash at the house (you get to place a token on the Crash Space for free), draw a card, or trade. Trade can be done hand-to-hand (you choose an opponent to place a card from their hand into yours, then you reciprocate), Stuff-to-Stuff (the same as hand-to-hand, only with cards you've already taken from your hand and played in front of you), or hand-to-board (take any face-up card from in front of a house and replace it, face up, with one from your hand).

If you choose to draw a card for your action (or a space tells you to do so), you have a choice of taking the face-up card that's in front of the house with you, or drawing the next facedown card from the deck.

Playing a card has a cost in favors. You must have enough favors in the house you're standing in front of to play it. Most cards offer discounts, though -- Leftover Rice costs two favors, but if you're in front of the waitress' house it only

costs one favor. The Real French Beret costs one favor, but if you're in front of the artist's house, the -1 discount means it doesn't cost a thing. Some cards have a special effect that makes them more valuable (like extra points at the end of the game for having the Laptop and the Time on the Internet cards) or gives them a whole other function (discard the card and get free favor tokens). Each card also has a point value, used to determine the winner at the end of the game.

When the last card of the deck is drawn, the game is almost over; finish out this round and then total the points (so if Player 2 in a three-player game draws the last card, he and Player 3 finish out their turns and the game ends). In order to qualify for victory, you must have at least one each of Food, Shelter, and Clothing -- if you have a token on someone's Crash Space, that counts as Shelter. Among those who have this sacred moocher's troika, the player with the highest total point value of Stuff (cards in your hand don't count) wins the game. Finer Things, while they don't determine whether you can be considered for victory, are usually worth a lot more points than the other card types. If no one has the necessary selection of Stuff, everyone's a loser . . . not that it comes as a surprise.

Freeloader requires more extraneous equipment to play than most Cheapass games, but that's about the only fault. The pieces are typical Cheapass bargain-basement stock and the most color you get out of it is the green tinting on the backs of the cards, which means you're getting another darned amusing game at an almost criminal price. Play is lickety-split, and though the one-action limit seems prohibitive, the game is one of those rare instances where your next turn will roll around before you can stand up for a soda. In spite of everything that goes on in a game and all the possible actions for a player, it's remarkably easy to pick up on the dynamics.

The "Dear Diary" commentary on the cards is cute at worst and hilarious at its best, the artwork is comical and brutally honest, and the mechanics of the thing make you gape in wide wonder at how much playtesting Ernest's products must receive. **Freeloader** is breezy entertainment, and one of the most engrossing offerings yet from the Cheapass line. Almost makes you feel like you're mooching off James Ernest for real.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Cannibal Pygmies in the Jungle of Doom

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Written by Stephen Tassie

Illustrated by Steve Bryant, Tom Castillo, and Jason Millet

120 cards; \$19.95

A favorite card game from last year, at least with our gaming group, was [Grave Robbers From Outer Space](#), published by Z-Man Games. In that game, players had to build their own B-movie, using Character, Prop, and Location cards while sending Creature cards to destroy the other movies and fend off Creatures sent by the other players. The theme, as the title implies, was taken from the best -- and the worst -- of the B-movie science fiction and horror films made during the fifties and sixties.

Unfortunately, *Grave Robbers From Outer Space* had a number of slight flaws. One of these was that you never got the feeling that you were actually creating a movie during play. Much of this was down to the simple game play that came down to matching a Creature card's "Attack Strength" against the "Defense Strength" of the movie. Fortunately, *Grave Robbers From Outer Space* had one big thing going for it -- a sense of humor that so firmly stuck tongue in cheek, it warranted its PG-13 certificate! The game worked because it poked a very sly and knowing finger at its inspiration, and if you knew the unwritten rules of the genre, then *Grave Robbers From Outer Space* was all the more funnier.

The author employs the same format and game play for the sequel *Cannibal Pygmies in the Jungle of Doom*. Again drawing upon B-movies for its inspiration, the game is not that of science fiction or horror, but Saturday morning jungle movies, including such favorites as the Tarzan series and other films set in the Amazon/equatorial Africa/cannibal head hunter infested Borneo, but probably shot in the Everglades of Florida with a menagerie of beasts drawn from local zoos and safari parks. Along the way there is a cock of the fedora or three to the Indiana Jones trilogy and Ms. Lara Croft and the *Tomb Raider* franchise.

Cannibal Pygmies in the Jungle of Doom comes in the same sized flat box as *Grave Robbers From Outer Space*, inside of which can be found a 120-card deck and a small rules leaflet. These rules are clearly written and after a read through or two, everyone -- between two and six players -- can get their B-movie rolling and hopefully in the can.

The cards are done in the same style and layout as those from the prequel game. They are divided into characters (colored blue), locations (green), and props (brown), all of which have a "Defense Strength" number. Only the red colored Creature cards possess "Attack Strength," while the yellow-colored SFX cards have neither. The SFX cards are also the only ones without an illustration. Each of the illustrations is done as a movie still, and although appropriate, they are not quite as amusing as those found in *Grave Robbers From Outer Space*. Each card also has a quote, a list of its traits, and an explanation of its effects.

Before a card is played its quote must be read aloud. Some of our favorite quotes include . . .

- "Is there any more Billy?" from the SFX card "We have to eat someone . . . I mean something."
- "They've been banging those drums like Ringo Starr all night long." from the "The Natives are Restless" SFX card.
- The "Voodoo Doll" SFX card's "Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!"



- The "Evil yes, but you can't fault their fashion sense." of the Nazi Troops Creature card.
- "The Lost City" location card's "The Lost City!", "How do you know?", "Simple, we're lost and that's a city."
- "Ahh! It's the creature from the Blue Lagoon!" from the "Secluded Lagoon" location card.
- "What's that Skippy? You think the sacred idol is cursed?" from the "Skippy the Wonder Dog" character card.
- The "Native Translator" character card's "B'wana, Jujishi say, 'Is that a tentacle?'"

In these last two character cards and the aforementioned "We have to eat someone . . . I mean something.", the designer makes a knowing reference back to the tentacle and Billy's dismembered bodily parts gags that ran right the way through *Grave Robbers from Outer Space*.

Play begins by creating a movie title using the words listed at the bottom of every card. This is done with just six cards and extra points can be scored if any of these points appear in a player's scoring hand at the end of the game. These cards are then shuffled back into the deck and each player receives a starting hand of six cards. This must contain at least one character card before play can begin -- if not, the cards are discarded and a new hand is dealt to that player until they have one that contains a character card. These characters are put down on the table as the starting cast of their movie.

During a turn, a player first refreshes his hand back up to six, then can put down new characters and add new props to them or shift props between characters. A character may receive only one prop per turn, but may carry as many as they want. There is no limit to the number of Location cards that can be played, but only one can be played per movie, which can be that of any player. This Location replaces any already in play. Putting a Location card down on someone else's movie can be really evil! SFX cards can be played for various effects such as "Out of Ammo" ("How many bullets are left?", "None. I counted. Twice."), which removes all "Guns" cards in play; "Raised by Wolves" ("Who brought you up?") which gives one character a permanent Defense Strength bonus and the 'Native' trait; and the dreaded "Earthquake" ("Hold onto your butts, this is gonna be a bumpy ride!") which ends a player's turn, but also forces every other player to return their hand to the deck . . . the deck is shuffled and everyone is dealt a new hand of exactly the same number as they had before. SFX cards can be played at any time by anyone, though the player whose turn it is always has the option to play them before anyone else.

Additionally, attacks can be made against rival movies. This consists of sending a Creature, such as Haitian Voodoo Dancing Zombies, Evil Minions, and the eponymous "Cannibal Pygmies in the Jungle of Doom" to compare against the movie's total Defense Strength. If the Attack Strength equals or is greater than the Defense Strength of the target movie, the movie loses a character; if the Attack Strength is less, the attack fails. In either case, the creature card is discarded. Some cards are affected by special rules during an attack, such as the "Gun" props inability to defend against creatures with the "Swarm" trait and the limitation upon "Aquatic" creatures being able to attack movies without a location or those with the Aquatic trait as well. Of course, after a successful attack, the first character to be selected as a victim and discarded from the movie -- along with all of their props -- has to be a Native!

The game ends on the turn that the last card is drawn or when a "Roll the Credits" SFX card is played. This can happen after two complete rounds have been played and the person putting it down must have both a character card and a card with the treasure trait in play. At that point, everyone totals up the Defense Strength of their cards in play, adding bonuses for various SFX cards they hold as well as any cards whose words might match those of the movie title decided upon at the beginning of the game. One question not answered by the rules is if all of a movie's location cards are included in this total, though it would seem reasonable to do so.

Cannibal Pygmies in the Jungle of Doom is just as much fun as *Grave Robbers From Outer Space*, and if you liked that game, then you will like this one as well. In one sense, it is slightly funnier, because it is drawing from a narrower genre, as opposed to the broader source for *Grave Robbers From Outer Space*. It is possible to mix the two sets of cards together for a much longer and sillier cross-genre game -- the average game of *Cannibal Pygmies in the Jungle of Doom* takes about thirty minutes. The limited game play of *Cannibal Pygmies in the Jungle of Doom* may limit its future as a long term favorite, but many will still be drawn back to its winning style and sly sense of humor.

--Matthew Pook

Bride of Clio's Nightmares

"I think you are falling into the very general error of confining the spiritual world to the supremely good; but the supremely wicked, necessarily, have their portion in it."

-- Arthur Machen, "The White People"

Every year [at this time](#), the muse of history nods off, and in her dreams she stumbles down some dark and dangerous paths indeed. This year, her nightmares spring from Arthur Machen's observation above -- that the supernatural contains both great good and great evil, and that telling them apart can be tricky. In her dreams, Clio sees three legendary events, when something Outside reached through and touched the course of history. But the door swings both ways, and Outside is sometimes also Below . . .

"At dawn of day he arose, and communicated the marvel to his friends: and then, calling together the workers in gold and precious stones, he sat in the midst of them, and described to them the figure of the Sign he had seen, bidding them represent it in gold and precious stones. . . . [H]e sent for those who were acquainted with the mysteries . . . and enquired who that god was, and what was intended by the Sign of the vision he had seen."

-- Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Conversion of Constantine*, xxx-xxxii

Four days before Samhain, 312 A.D., waiting to do battle at the Milvian Bridge, Constantine sees a Sign in the skies. It mystifies him and fills him with awe and terror, even as he reads letters burned into his inner eye proclaiming that "This Sign Shall Conquer." An empire at stake, he orders the Sign beaten into soft, yellow gold, and embroidered on the purple battle flags of his legions. When the armies clash the next day, his foes shriek in terror, or stand mute and dumb even as Constantine's men hack them to death in an orgy of relieved fear. He has become Emperor, and now he sees the Sign everywhere he looks. Rome is not grand enough for him; the cities of the earth seem bland and empty. Constantine finds a city that can match the grand hieropolis he sees in his mind, on the shore of the Sea of Marmora. He rebuilds Byzantium in the image of the city on Lake Hali, and names it Carcosa, and robes and masks himself in pallid yellow as its Emperor.

For a time, his realm spread out over the Earth, from the stone circles of Britain to the sacred fires of Persia. From every corner of his empire, black galleys with the Yellow Sign on their sails, or legions in gray and oily armor under the Tattered Banner, brought back books and artifacts and scions of a certain hidden lineage that Constantine's captains could recognize. The armies of the Prophet burned Carcosa's stench out of the East, but its miasms still spread through the West. Monks carved the eyes out of icons, or made the Sign surreptitiously to others as they passed. Finally, in 1204, the Black Stars may have come around at last. The Pallid Mask is empty, no claimant holds the throne -- the lineage has corrupted itself into impotence and dust. But Pope Innocent knows that the Mask will fill itself soon; that a new progenitor will see the Yellow Sign -- unless a few brave Crusaders can enter the nighted city and destroy it before it welcomes its unknown King in Yellow.

"Not far from Domremy there is a tree that they call 'The Ladies' Tree' . . . Often I have heard the old folk -- they are not of my lineage -- say that the fairies haunt this tree . . . I have seen the young girls putting garlands on the branches of this tree, and I myself have sometimes put them there with my companions; sometimes we took these garlands away, sometimes we left them . . . I may have danced there formerly, with the other children. I have sung there more than danced."

-- from the testimony of [Joan of Arc](#) at her trial, Feb. 24, 1431

She came out of nowhere, a maiden with uncanny powers of persuasion and luck, of second sight and impossible feats of arms. Her parentage was always suspect, her supposed family diffident about her. But in 1430 she fell into the hands of the Burgundians almost without resistance -- almost as if she meant it to happen. The few survivors later recalled her words at the trial: "You may well ask me some things on which I shall tell you the truth and some on which I shall not tell it you. If you were well informed about me, you would wish to have me out of your hands." If only they had listened. Instead, they kept her closely watched and bound, and burned her at the stake -- or part of her, at any rate. The fire scorched away her outer rind, freeing the millions of tiny spores within her skin. The flames burned thousands of them, to be sure, but hundreds of thousands rode the column of heated air and blew away across

France on the east wind. Joan of Arc, mandrake, had put forth her seed.

The last English troops left French soil in 1453, pursued by vegetable things that howled and gibbered, faces that jumped from tree to tree down to the sheltering Channel. Even the wood of the ships had to be dissolved in aqua regia to kill any sheltering spores. Over the next century, the uncanny wood grew, sending shoots south to be met by the frantic fires of the Inquisition, and east to stop at the Rhine. Whispered stories told of towns that had made their peace with the mandrakes, allowed to live and weave silk and grow cattle -- and supply human seed to quicken the soil beneath the mandrake-trees. But there could be no peace with England; a thousand tiny driftwood invasions were beaten back, and a hundred mandrakes boiled as witches in the countryside. Now John Dee hears rumors that the Spanish, weakened by their long war, may give in at last and let the Forest across the Pyrenees -- in exchange for a mandrake-wood armada to invade England. Only his most trusted herbalists, alchemists, and sea dogs can carry his alkahest to Rouen and stanch the contagion at its source.

"I fell into a slumber, for I was weary. I soon began to dream. There seemed to be a death-like stillness about me. Then I heard subdued sobs, as if a number of people were weeping. I thought I left my bed and wandered downstairs. There the silence was broken by the same pitiful sobbing, but the mourners were invisible.... Determined to find the cause of a state of things so mysterious and so shocking, I kept on until I arrived at the East Room, which I entered . . . Before me was a catafalque, on which rested a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments. Around it were stationed soldiers who were acting as guards; and there was a throng of people, some gazing mournfully upon the corpse, whose face was covered, others weeping pitifully. 'Who is dead in the White House?' I demanded of one of the soldiers. 'The President,' was his answer."

-- Abraham Lincoln recounting his dream of April 2, 1865, as recorded by his friend Ward Hill Lamon

The Abraham Lincoln who awoke on April 3 had his wart on the other side of his face. Nobody noticed, except First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, who swore the "death-fetch," or doppelgänger, Lincoln had seen in a [mirror](#) in 1860 had "come out." Nobody listened to her ravings, and the Pinkerton men kept her secure and out of sight. Sherman marched to a fallen Richmond after receiving a telegram from the White House, and burned it as he had Atlanta. Lincoln fired Grant after a shouted conference, and his new commander, Benjamin Butler, carried out his orders and hung Robert E. Lee and his entire command from the trees around Appomattox. "The war is not settled," the President said to his cabinet, "until every rebel has paid his share of the cost." Few objected; the abolitionists and the Radicals saw their dreams coming true -- freedom finally marched with fire and sword -- and the army, too, had its share of men who thirsted for vengeance. John Wilkes Booth's failed attempt to kill Lincoln on Good Friday (the guard who claimed to have seen the bullet strike home disappeared after his dismissal) only cemented the popular belief that the Confederacy could not be reconstructed without being destroyed, first.

Nathan Bedford Forrest and his Kuklos riders took to the hills and woods, and the South began its terrible resistance, raiding depots, hijacking trains, and killing soldiers -- or freed slaves, if the soldiers were too strong. Union commanders who refused to burn towns and execute hostages in partisan warfare found their careers sidelined and more ferocious men promoted in their stead. Nobody could find Jefferson Davis, although the reward for his severed head would have bought every whore in the Union Occupation camps. Lincoln's campaign for a third term in 1868 is underway -- Grant has died suddenly after criticizing the Occupation, and the few who oppose Lincoln's paean to "the wrathful angels of our nature" find themselves under Pinkerton scrutiny or clapped into military camps without habeas corpus. In all of this turmoil, the disappearance of (no doubt fraudulent) "spirit photographer" William Mumler barely rates a mention -- except for the rumor that his photographs of the President have also all disappeared. A handful of people across the country -- discharged cavalry officers, voodoo priestesses from New Orleans, Indian medicine men, electrical experimenters like Tom Edison -- have heard this rumor. And all of them have seen the ghost of President Lincoln in their dreams, pleading with them to kill the President and save the Union!

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



A Loose-Fitting Straightjacket

One of the biggest appeals of roleplaying games is the freedom it gives its protagonists; within the context of the game, you can go anywhere and do anything. Thus if the characters are riding a bus, they can sit quietly 'til the scene changes, they can strike up a conversation with the bus driver, they can try converting the other bus passengers to their religion, they can be arrested for attempting to get a major high off the toxic paint used to paint the vehicle (making it thus a bus buss robust buzz bust). That freedom is part of what makes the roleplaying game so compelling when it works. (It's also one of the reasons computer games are seldom as satisfying as their tabletop counterparts; you may be free to *go* anywhere in a computer roleplaying game, but all too often you're limited in your actions to . . . well, clicking the mouse button.)

In contrast, one of the biggest appeals of the horror genre is the *lack* of freedom afforded the main characters. Whimpering in a fetal ball while covered with rats, getting tied to a table as a pendulum slowly descends, or being helplessly hacked by unseen blades are all wacky fates that may be in store for your typical horror character.

So how, then, do you reconcile this seeming inconsistency? Is horror gaming thus impossible?

Well, if so, then no one's bothered to tell the legions of horror gaming fans.

No, although it *can* be tricky. But done right, you can present your players with freedom, *and* keep that oppressive feeling that builds horrific atmosphere.

Damned If You Do . . .

Perhaps the most popular option is to present the players with choices, none of which are good ones. Thus if the hero's adolescent son is possessed by an insanely powerful sinister entity which will wreak havoc if allowed to go free, what options does the hero have? Well, perhaps he can kill the child, imprison him, or let him loose to do what he will. Obviously, none of these are good choices. In this way, the players have the freedom to explore a myriad of options, although the character will almost certainly feel trapped by the situation.

Even better, since there *is* freedom to do anything, then it's quite possible the players will think of a solution that *will* work; maybe the players get the idea to break the child's legs, in an effort to coax the spirit out and get it to possess the body of a cultist that has been attacking them. Well, the heroes almost certainly won't have as much of a problem dealing with the cultist in a permanent manner. Such victories - especially in long-running horror campaigns - will only serve to encourage the players, and emphasize the inevitable defeats.

You Can Do Anything . . . Not That It Matters Anyway

Freedom doesn't mean much if there's no obvious course of action. One of the PCs finds a sealed envelope with a typed note slipped under his door. It reads simply, "You will witness 100 people die in three days." (Players are suckers for typed notes with simple unsigned messages. So are [editors](#).) The note only seems to exist for the recipient; if it is shown to anyone else, it appears to be simply a blank sheet of paper. The next day he receives another note: "You will witness 100 people die in two days." Efforts to track down who is leaving the note will prove ineffective; there are no fingerprints on the notes (or the fingerprints will belong to someone who died 25 years ago!), trying to ambush the person leaving the notes will result in him getting away (or the heroes will capture him, but he'll have no idea what they are talking about), and so on. The next day he receives another note: "You will witness 100 people die tomorrow." And the next day he receives another note that says simply, "Today." And, during the course of the events of that day, something will happen where, indeed, the person witnesses exactly 100 people die. (For that extra bit of horror, perhaps the authorities discover that 99 people die, and the hero stumbles across the 100th person himself . . . for double extra horror, that 100th person is someone he is close to.)

And then the next day he receives a note that says, "You will witness one million people die in three days."

Played right, *this* is horrific constraining freedom. The players can do almost anything they can think of, and none of it seems to matter. Of course, it will take careful planning on the GM's part to make sure the players don't feel that their efforts are moot; otherwise they may well stop doing anything and wait for whatever inevitable conclusion to arrive. A simple technique to make a plot such as the one above work is to make it part of a larger plot where the heroes *can* affect the outcome; this plot may or may not have anything to do with the inevitable subplot. In this way although it's horrific to consider that you will witness the death of a million people, in its own way it pales to the evil that will be unleashed if the sinister Daehder cult succeeds in summoning Ctharrot'op and bringing about the end of the world.

To capture the atmosphere of this technique fully, try watching many classic episodes of the *Twilight Zone*; in many episodes the protagonist can do whatever he wants in response to the situation, and it generally won't make a difference (unless you're William Shatner . . . and even then you only get to escape from the *Twilight Zone once*.) Afterwards, watch *Groundhog Day* for a lighter take on the same idea.

Ticket To Writhe

Finally, one of the classic bits for constrained freedom is to allow the heroes to do what they want, but limit their environment in such a way that their options are limited. Thus having an adventure set upon a train, in a locked building, or in a tiny town under quarantine because of some exotic (and terrifying?) disease. (The setting of *Ravenloft* takes this to a logical extreme, putting characters in an entire *realm* they can't escape.) The heroes will have the freedom to pursue many options, but they will be limited and (in all likelihood) unable to escape the blanket of horror that surrounds the location.

Of course, all three techniques can be used together. Let's say our heroes are on the 20th floor of an 80-story skyscraper after the usual close of business. They begin to hear strange muffled noises coming from above. Then they discover that, for whatever reason, they are unable to go down in the building; stairwell doors refuse to open for lower floors (although they can climb up the stairwell), and the elevator refuses to respond unless the button pushed is higher than their current floor. And as they ascend higher in the building, they discern the muffled noises are actually screams of people that sound like they are in agony and pain. They are entirely free to explore the floor they are on, and can go up as much as they would like . . . but each such ascension brings them closer and closer to the source of the sounds of suffering. All attempts to contact the outside world fail; they may be able to contact someone for a few seconds, but not long enough to convey any meaningful message. If they simply stay put on one floor, they hear the sound getting closer anyway; inexplicably, the floor they are on is incrementing on its own! Finally, as the party goes from the 78th to the 79th floor or explores some high level floor, with the wailing of the tortured rising to an inhuman din around them, they discover a message scrawled in blood on wall of the elevator or stairwell (even though they had been on the elevator previously): "MURDER ONE OF YOUR OWN TO LEAVE". Do they follow the impossible choice presented? Do they continue to ascend and confront whatever is on the 80th floor? Do they attempt some kind of escape plan despite the height involved?

Freedom in a horror game is usually different from freedom in other games; the choices are more difficult, and may be more limited. Conversely, the confinement of many horror stories can be just as real in a roleplaying game, but in a different way. Through some careful planning and consideration, the best of both worlds can be something truly horrific.

* * *

Last week's answer: In Nomine Anime, p. 12.

(*One star*) "Every civilization has its own myth about the end of the world. The phrase itself conjures images of earthquakes, rains of fire, floods, plagues, crumbling civilizations, and a host of other terrifying catastrophes. These are powerful, evocative images of finality, and are not to be introduced lightly into an AD&D® campaign."

The Purgatory Mark

by Alice Turow

"On some level, all life . . ."

I stop myself, clutching the casket as a spasm wracks my body. I consider leaving a copy of the mark on the side of the casket. Wouldn't that be a surprise to the pallbearer? But that, like finishing my thought, would be a grave mistake.

I've been without people too long; my joints ache, both from the pain of self-consumption and the flowing of life from the crowd into me. I hear a child -- our neighbor Doris' boy Tad -- coughing in the church . . . a long, wet hacking. It is a sound like tuberculosis.

I reconsider. "I . . . miss her so much."

The crowd -- mostly her family -- mutters. They cannot suspect the full truth, but some surely suspect something. She was young; much younger than me. This was years ago; she aged poorly. The death of three children will do that to a mother. I looked little worse for the wear; my friend Jacob -- my last true friend -- called me a survivor. He died a few hours later.

That night, alone in the house we built together, the truth sinks in. I do miss her. I fight with my emotions as I feel my calf cramp up painfully; is this a true emotion, or because I need someone else now?

I look in the mirror and imagine it is a window into the hereafter. I speak again, mark on palm touching glass touching palm on mark. It is as close to an apology as I will ever be able to summon. "On some level, all life is parasitic."

Humanity, especially in modern times, is both social and antisocial; we want to interact with other people, but we also want the ability to be alone. This paradoxical tendency is perhaps exemplified in the Purgatory Mark, a tattoo-like manifestation that bestows considerable power upon its wearer, but at a horrible price.

The roughly circular mark resembles two black stylized ankh's looping onto themselves, the two tilde-like cross-arms almost -- but not quite -- touching each other. It otherwise looks like a normal tattoo, albeit a fairly fresh and sharp one that hasn't succumbed to the effects of aging or discoloration. It is just over one and a half inches in diameter.

The history of the Purgatory Mark is unclear. It is known that it is old; the Purgatory Mark is also called the Scar of Sawney Beane by some, since there is evidence that he and the Beane family, all cannibals, may have wielded its power while attacking their victims along in the 17th century Scottish coast. Those who have investigated its origins have found that it is probably *much* older than that; many believe the patterns of the Black Plague and rumors of witch marks bear some resemblance to the tattoo's workings, and others have wondered if some tales of the Old Testament were directly or indirectly caused by its powers.

Powers

The effects of the Purgatory Mark are both simple yet complicated. Whoever has the Purgatory Mark will have their greatest self-altering wish granted. This varies from person to person; for some it is to remain (or become) young; for others it is to morph into someone beautiful; for others it is to be strong and virile. These effects begin happening shortly after gaining the mark; they are not immediate and drastic, but rather subtle and meticulous. Still, if someone knows of the mark's abilities, the psychosomatic effects are often enough to amplify this pace; someone who believes he is handsome may well adopt an attractive aura immediately.

The tattoo does not seem to be able to alter the world around it; thus it could not make someone rich directly, but it could bestow him with the skill, intelligence, and drive necessary to grow wealthy. The tattoo *can* make radical changes in a person, given enough time; those wishing for height can grow from three-foot-six to six-foot-three within a years, and someone who has no legs may find the fondest wish of mobility granted, their stumps growing into working legs centimeter by centimeter over the course of five years.

Reports vary on what happens should the wish of the person change. In some cases there are reports that the new wish is granted at the same rate the old wish is undone; thus someone who wishes for height who then desires to be intelligent will find his IQ rising at the same time his body shrinks. In these cases, the mark never reverts someone back to a state worse than what they started with (except in cases where the situation would have grown worse naturally, such as a wish to stave off an illness or a wish for youth). In other cases it has been reported that only the wish upon acquisition is the one that is honored; in those cases, nothing the bearer wants or does will have any effect on the tattoo's powers.

Note that the Purgatory Mark does *not* require an actual vocalized wish; it is somehow able to tap the fondest desire it has the power to fulfill . . . perhaps even if the wearer doesn't consciously realize it himself.

The Purgatory Mark also has some other odd properties. First, it can be moved. This generally requires a fair bit of concentration on the part of the wearer, and usually some force from some part of the wearer's body. Thus the bearer can have the mark on his palm and push it along with his other hand, the mark shimmying beneath his skin like a pocket of oil underneath a plastic bag. There are reports that some people who have had the mark for very long periods (in excess of 20 years) can move it around *without* contact, through sheer force of concentration. Witnessing such an act would be disturbing, to say the least.

The Purgatory Mark can also be transferred or even copied, as will be discussed later.

Costs

The costs of the Purgatory Mark are equally simple yet subtle. It drains the life force of those around the bearer . . . very slowly. This manifests in a myriad of ways, none of them obvious to the casual untrained eye; victims become weaker, lethargic, forgetful, less driven, and so on. This draining requires casual but continual contact; people who are met only once or twice briefly will be immune to the effects, although someone who meets the wearer once a week (or even once a month) may find himself affected.

In general the Purgatory Mark requires the essence of one sentient person per year; animals and plants are unaffected. Once fully drained, the victim will usually die. (Such a fate is usually merciful by then.) This may be divided by however many people the wearer is surrounded with in casual ways; thus if the holder of the Purgatory Mark is a recluse save for his wife and three children, he will find all four of them dying within approximately four years. An employer who has 100 workers may find his workers *never* fully succumb to the effects of the mark, although his company will have an unusual number of employees out for sick leave, and the number who die shortly after retirement will be abnormally high.

If there is no one around for the mark to consume in this manner, then it will begin consuming the bearer *himself*. This is never in a permanent way; rather, the tattoo begins inflicting pain. This manifests first as dull aches, then becomes more and more acute until the marked one is nothing more than a writhing, screaming mass, fetal in nonstop agony with all nerves afire. Perversely, the mark seems to refuse to let someone who gets to this state die, despite a lack of, sleep, food, or water; there are rumors that mysterious wailing in some castles and buildings is actually caused by a long-isolated bearer of the mark, doomed to spend eternity alive in agony. It has been theorized that the tattoo does not feed off the drained energies directly, but rather the pain caused by the act of feeding. Although there is much against this theory, if it is true then the mark must view this final state of its wearer to be a remarkable feast. It takes roughly a year for someone to be rendered fully incapacitated and gibbering by the self-consumptive aspect of the tattoo.

One who has reached this state of agony is *not* forever lost; if he comes in contact with others for any significant

length of time, he will find himself functional (although still in pain) as the tattoo drains their life forces. After one man-year of company (thus, say, one month around 12 people) he will again find himself fully pain-free . . . with the dubious side benefit of not having aged during the time of his agony.

Beyond this cost, the Purgatory Mark has no other (known) detrimental effects. It does not seem to corrupt (or, at least, no more so than other items of great power), nor does it make its demands known. Of course, through trial and error most bearers of the tattoo will find their behavior modified, but this is not due to any direct influence of the mark. There is some concern from those who seek to quantify the energy being drawn by the Purgatory Mark; they claim that the energies being consumed (or transferred?) by the tattoo are considerably greater than those needed to bestow any given boon upon the wearer. Where, they wonder, is this excess energy going, or what is it being used to feed? As yet, no answers have proven satisfactory or comforting.

Removing the Mark

One who wishes to be rid of the mark will find himself in a bit of a bind. It is not a traditional tattoo by any definition, and any non-radical means of being rid of it -- laser surgery, skin scarification, and the like -- will prove unsuccessful; once the skin fully heals (and it *will* fully heal), the tattoo will still be there, as darkly pigmented as ever.

There are only two ways to be rid of the tattoo. The first is through amputation; this requires the removal of a sizable area (usually the arm up to the elbow or the leg up to the knee), since this is the only time the mark will move of its own volition, shimmying up the limb to make it someplace that will *not* be amputated. (Note that when the threat of amputation is over, the tattoo will still behave as it always did, including being movable to its old locale; if it is able of retaining any kind of memory or "grudge," its actions belie this fact.)

The tattoo will remain on the amputated limb, and act akin to a copy (see below).

The second way to be rid of the mark is through transference. If the bearer wishes, he can transfer the Purgatory Mark entirely to someone else; this is done through a process similar to moving it, except the mark is placed against the skin of the person where the bearer wishes to move it; there the tattoo will move across to its new home. There seem to be two rules behind such transferal:

The new recipient must be a sentient; the mark cannot be transferred to a dog, for example (although it can be copied to one; again, see below).

The new recipient must be conscious, although he need not be willing; there is at least one account from a former bearer of how he transferred it to a bound and gagged prisoner, futilely struggling to avoid the mark. If the new recipient is not conscious, then the transferal is treated as a copy.

The third way to be rid of the mark is by dying; since the tattoo cannot bestow any kind of immortality or imperviousness to damage, it is still entirely possible for one with the mark to die (naturally or otherwise). At that point, the corpse is treated as any another object with the Purgatory Mark.

Regardless of how the mark is removed, its benefits fade at a rate akin to the bearer's wish changing, as discussed above. If a new bearer is the recipient, he immediately begins gaining the benefits (as well as inflicting its costs on those around him).

Copying the Mark

If the possessor of the Purgatory Mark attempts to transfer it to an object instead of another sentient being, something unusual happens. The mark is instead *copied* onto the object; the bearer retains his original, but a duplicate is on the surface of the object. On an inanimate object, the mark resembles something drawn with ink; it otherwise seems unspectacular in any way. The copy cannot be moved by any means, even by the person who did the copy; it will remain in its set locale indefinitely.

Indeed, it will probably remain there forever. One of the side effects of the Purgatory Mark on a non-sentient object is preservation; a piece of paper with the mark will remain white and crisp as the day it was minted, and the flesh roughly around the area of a dead or amputated part with the mark will remain perfectly preserved. In fact, the mark (and the area immediately around it) cannot be destroyed by any known means; bullets will fail to affect it (although the force will be transferred just fine), fire will not damage it, and so on. On the other hand, once the mark is on an inanimate (or dead) object, it no longer drains those around it; mark can remain on the cover of a dusty tome in a librarian's special collection, with no one any the wiser . . . until it is touched.

The seeming immortality of the mark is one of its more insidious effects, because it means that every copy of the mark that has ever been still exists somewhere in some form. Even worse, if a conscious sentient comes in contact with the mark by *any* means, he will find it transferred to his skin . . . usually slithering along the fingertip through the finger before resting on the palm. (Of course, from there it can be moved as normal.)

Note that copying or transferring the mark is a conscious act, and requires the agreement and mental effort of the bearer; it is impossible to "accidentally" put the mark on someone or something else. Copying the mark requires little effort, and can be done as many times as the bearer likes. No one can *ever* have more than one Purgatory Mark at any time.

Such copies of the mark (indeed, *all* manifestations of the tattoo) have one additional power: They are immune to the draining effects of all other Purgatory Marks (although, of course, the bearer can still be drained by his own). This can result in a *very* difficult decision for those with the mark; if he wishes to protect a person -- or people -- around him from the draining effects of his mark, he may be tempted to bestow a copy of the mark to him (by first copying it to an inanimate object, then handing the object to his associate). But doing so means that the two of them will drain surrounding relations twice as fast; two people, each with the mark, will deplete a third person to death in a mere six months. If a group of friends all had copies of the mark, they would find those around them becoming sickly and dying at a frightening rate.

This is the true danger of the mark; copies can get out of control, and too many in an isolated region can devastate the area. It is rumored that one of the goals of both the Crusades and the Inquisition was for the church to gain control of these marks, and there are whispers of an all-but-forgotten vault in the Vatican containing hundreds and hundreds of severed limbs, each bearing a copy of the mark. (If this is true, it makes one wonder why they weren't simply dumped in the Marianas Trench . . . and what contingency plan they are being saved for.)

The Purgatory Mark in a Game

The Purgatory Mark can be useful in many games with horrific elements; like many classic works of horror, the mark can enter the story as a tiny -- almost insignificant -- element, then spiral out of control into something truly terrifying. It can lurk in the shadows, waiting to be discovered on the dead bodies of downed foes . . . and woe befall any who brush up against the mark itself on such a corpse! Or it can form the basis for a region-shattering plot; envision a huge cult, traveling from town to town every few years, leaving behind thousands of dead or infirm people behind.

The Purgatory Mark is also well-suited for gaming, since it can form a dynamic conundrum for a typical party. If one person acquires the mark, how does he get rid of it? Does he drain his friends while he grows more powerful, or does he bestow copies on them, making the group more powerful yet increasing the danger to all those around?

Adventure Seeds

- The rat catcher: A reclusive man with the Purgatory Mark has been driven slowly mad by the pain of seclusion; before succumbing fully to unmovable agony, he has devised a plan. He has begun breeding rats in his house . . . hundreds and hundreds of rats. He has transferred a copy of the mark onto each one, and is planning on releasing them in the city. Can the heroes stop him before he unleashes his horde upon the city?
- A painfully shy teacher wishes nothing more than to be alone. She acquires the mark from the inside of an old kettle at an antique store, and suddenly discovers that she is much less noticeable by society. This is a dream for

her, yet some of her students are getting more lethargic and less motivated in class; all her efforts to spend additional time with those children just makes the situation worse. Will the investigators be able to put together the clues, when her one ability is wishing *not* to be found?

- The Mafia has been hit hard by recent state and federal efforts to shut them down. A mysterious stranger -- who is almost inhumanly likeable -- offers them the tool they need to become competitive again. But he isn't sharing the whole story, and the cure he offers may ultimately be more devastating than the problem . . .
- One of the PCs receives a letter in the mail from an enemy thought long-dead. It contains nothing more than a mysterious sigil. (This would be ideal to hand as a prop to players; make sure to observe how they interact with the paper, and whether or not they touch the Purgatory Mark.)

Common Misapprehensions in Swordplay

by Hugh Hancock

So your barbarian warrior is on a rampage. He cuts. He slashes. He swings his enormous two-handed sword around him, showing off his mighty thews to best advantage. And finally he raises his sword high above his head, preparing the stroke that will cleave his opponent in two.

At which point, said opponent notices that our barbarian is being very stupid, and skewers him.

Swordplay is a complex and fascinating art. It's also one that is very poorly understood. Here are some quick tips to improve your description of combat in games, and potentially save your own character's mighty thews from a severe beating.

It's Swordplay, Not Baseball

Any warrior who swings his sword high above his head is simply asking for a poke in the chest with a sharp implement. The word "fencing" descends from the word "defense": the primary aim of any sword technique is to avoid dying. To this end, it is quite literally suicidal to pull your weapon and arm away from the front of your body, even briefly.

The primary culprits of this error are probably the aforementioned barbarian warriors. Well, there's no accounting for training in a primitive culture, but the two-handed sword, in particular, was not used in anything like the wide-swinging fashion commonly represented in books and films. Anyone using a long sword like a hand-and-a-half or two-handed sword is likely to keep the point forward and pointed at his opponent(s), often raising the hilt to shoulder height and angling the blade down. In combat, the style is a mixture of rapid drawn cuts across the body (with very little movement of the blade in the cut) and powerful thrusts driven from the legs through the arms.

It's very possible to split armor or a breastbone with a thrust from a two-handed sword in such a fashion: there's no need to go swinging the sword up high and presenting an opponent with an undefended location.

Point Beats Edge -- Most Of The Time . . .

This is simple fact, and fact that was thoroughly proven by a number of very bad-tempered gentlemen with swords in the 15th through 17th centuries in particular. In terms of sheer speed, a point attack (a thrust, basically) is always faster than a cut, because of the relative distances of travel involved.

What does this mean? Well, it means that civilian weapons, in particular, tend towards thrusting attacks as swordplay styles develop. Hence, the later the historical period that your game roughly hails from, the more point attacks and point-focussed weapons (like the rapier, or its successor the small sword, which, loosely, developed into the fencing foil) are likely to predominate.

However, that's not the case in military circles, which continued to develop purely cutting weapons like the saber. Why? Because of one of the main considerations for any swordsman: recovery. A thrust is a good deal more likely to get caught in the body of your opponent than a well-placed cut, particularly if both of you are moving (as, for example, a cavalryman is likely to be). That can range from seriously inconvenient to terminally deadly (if your sword is in your opponent as his horse panics, and you're attached to your weapon with a strap or enclosing hilt).

(GMs, take note: There's more to think about with a choice of weapon and style than just damage potential; if your players forget about that, it's time to remind them!)

Another reason why the cut is more prevalent than the thrust in military circles is a matter of training time. For a highly trained fencer, a thrust, as mentioned, is quite lethal. However, it is also both harder to execute properly (and fairly ineffective if executed improperly) and harder to actually land than a cut. While both of these problems can be cured by training, for the minimally-trained soldier, a cutting attack is a much more sure thing, delivering a far more certain blow compared to a thrust.

What's In A Name?

Is it a rapier? A small sword? A flamberge? A sidesword?

No, it's probably just a sword. Perhaps a "Spanish Sword," or an "Elven Sword," but probably just a sword.

Most names for swords are the inventions of modern historians. There are some exceptions (such as the Zweihander two-handed sword -- although that name literally means "Two-handed sword"), but mostly a historical swordsmith or fencer would have referred to swords simply as "swords."

This is partially a reflection of the fact that, while it appears to us that there were a huge range of sword types to distinguish from, in actual fact these "types" are spread over hundreds of years of sword development. At any given period, only one or two sword styles at most were likely to be popular outside the salles of fencing historians: the hand-and-a-half and the sidesword, the saber and small sword, and so on. When new styles of sword were being introduced (such as in the 16th century, with the advent of the rapier), it was likely to happen across cultural boundaries, and so what we know as a rapier would be more likely to be referred to as a "Spanish sword" by those unfamiliar with it, and simply a "sword" by those who developed it.

The most common distinction in swords is likely to be the distinction between a civilian and military sword, as the two have very different functions. However, again, it's more likely that a warrior would call a sword a "civvy's sword" rather than a "sidesword."

But doesn't this mean that a visit to the local blacksmith would be rather boring? On the contrary: swords did not come in set "patterns," such as "rapier" -- rather, one would (if one had the money to buy a custom sword) design the sword to one's own specifications, picking out blades suitable for particular styles or tactics and matching them with features of the hilt and balance as one wished. PCs don't have to be stuck with a "rapier" or a "broadsword" -- if they have the money and want a two-handed sword with a swept hilt to deflect blows, or wish to use a sword with a simple hilt but a very light blade for cutting, a swordsmith would expect that level of perfectionism. Personalize your weapon!

You Don't Need Those Mighty Thews . . .

A good sword is not so heavy that it is an effort to swing. It's as simple as that. Speaking from personal experience, the author has never had any trouble performing a good attack with any well-made sword, from a cavalry saber to a rapier to a Zweihander, despite being a not-tremendously-muscular person. Some replica alleged "weapons" are indeed quite hard to swing, but this has more to do with inauthentic use of materials than the original pattern. Likewise, it should rarely be any effort to parry an attack, if the parry is well-formed: indeed, it is possible to exert literally no effort on a parry with most weapons and still block a full-force, full-blooded attack.

So is all that "Strength 12 minimum" stuff rubbish? Well, mostly, but not entirely. Some swords, and some sword styles, do indeed require a good deal of strength: however, it's not for the reasons, or the styles, that you might think.

Most of the demands for strength in swordplay come from the need for endurance. Repeatedly swinging a heavy saber, for example, will begin to wear away at the muscles after a while (and even much lighter weapons are more of an effort to keep moving than they might appear). More significantly, several weapons (notably the side-sword and the rapier) incorporate a number of "guard" positions which demand a good deal of strength to maintain, particularly the so-called "hanging" guards (where the arm is held at around head-height, partially extended, with the blade extended outward to point at the opponent).

In these cases, while it isn't practically impossible for a weaker-than-average person to hold or wield the blade, they may not be able to use the full range of techniques available to the style. However, virtually any character can use virtually any weapon; weaker or untrained characters will simply have problems with tiring rapidly. Note, too, that it is entirely possible for virtually anyone to train themselves and their muscles up to use any weapon.

But doesn't increased strength mean increased damage? Not really. A well-formed attack from any sword will incapacitate or kill, virtually irrespective of the strength of the wielder; indeed, much technique is designed to minimize the amount of strength required on an attack, and thus make the style less effort for the wielder. A wild swing from a bodybuilder will probably still do less damage than a well-formed attack from a trained weakling; while the raw strength will give the blow some power, it is actually the speed of the weapon's movement, the targeting, and the follow-up that does the most damage.

In fact, most sword masters council against attacking an opponent using more strength in the blow than you need -- an overly powerful attack delivered well will certainly kill your opponent, but will quite possibly then leave your blade stuck inside his body while his friends move up looking irritated. If you miss, the situation is grimmer still -- a controlled attack will leave you in a position to defend yourself if your attack is not successful, but a wild haymaker is likely to pull your sword wildly out of line, leaving you completely open to your opponent.

In game terms, skill should matter a great deal more than strength when determining practical damage. While strong-but-untrained people may be able to do a fair amount of damage should they hit, they also open themselves up to some truly vicious fumbles whether they hit or miss in combat.

It's More Than Hack-And-Slash

There is a certain perception that the Eastern martial arts have a massive body of lore and learning (and "technique"), where the Western martial arts (swordplay, primarily) either have no finesse or rely entirely on very simple techniques combined with natural ability and practice. This is rubbish, no matter what time period is being discussed.

In actual fact, western-style swordplay is based upon a wide body of technique and training, backed up by some principles which, while simple in theory, take considerably more than a lifetime to master. From the earliest hand-and-a-half or two-handed treatises to the 19th century treatises on saber, all Western weapons include an extensive selection of learning and technique, which makes for fascinating study and dramatic gaming.

Far from being simple but well-timed or brutish hacking, for example, a well-trained 13th century swordsman will be using a wide variety of techniques, from avoidance and deflection techniques reminiscent of Eastern styles like Aikido, to brutal and unique closing techniques using "half-sword" (holding the blade like a quarterstaff), pommel, and quillion to inflict damage. Your hero doesn't just have to hack and slash; he can use tai chi-like "coiling" strikes with his sword, use an opponent's blow as momentum to power his own attacks, dance around his foes with graceful and deadly footwork, and more.

For More Information . . .

There is a mountain of work for study if you want to improve your own knowledge of the sword: in particular, the Association of European Medieval Martial Arts <http://www.aemma.org> has an excellent on-line library.

The sword is probably the most important single item in most fantasy or historical games. It is also the one that can provide the most color, interest and drama -- there's a lot more to it than just loincloths and stirring battle cries. So have at it!

The God WSHN

by Elizabeth McCoy

WSHN -- pronounced "Weshin" by non-believers and simply "God" or "the Lord" by followers -- is a monotheistic, mildly patriarchal deity. His chapels are primarily outside structures, though the very richest churches have walls and ceilings to protect from the elements, and are as elegantly furnished with stained glass as one might expect, though with unexpected skylights.

Physical Church Structure

A typical WSHN church is an outdoor structure, surrounded by a park of some kind, and comes in four layers -- the ground level is pathways, going around (and sometimes under) the main structure, and gardens or at least flowers. Ramps or spiral stairs lead up to the next level (call it B), a large circular area on each side that may or may not meet in the center. The level above that (call it A) is two smaller circles that do mesh together in the center, with a half-wall (or lower "curb") to either side partly separating it from the two or three stairs that lead to the final level. Ideally, a WSHN church is made of stone to resist the elements, and the final level has a podium-like altar (or altar-like podium, depending on the sect). All levels above the ground one will have half-walls to prevent accidental falls, and the final level has a full-wall behind it, as if to frame a speaker.

The very poorest, crudest churches are only two levels -- the ground one, marked in two large circles, and the altar-level.

Most churches have no seating; some of the indoor ones will, for attendees who are known to be ill or infirm, and a few which are essentially "handicapped" spaces for those who cannot sit on the floor. These are all around the edges of the congregation circles (levels A and B), so that those seated will not be in the way of the rituals.

The Rituals

Services are held at dawn, noon, and dusk. Dawn services begin after the sun has cleared the horizon, and dusk services end just as the sun touches the horizon, ideally. In theory, everyone should attend each service. In practice, noon-services are the heaviest attended, and most people attend only one a day -- the minimum required to be a "good WSHNite." People try to wear colorful -- though not gaudy -- comfortable clothing to attend.

The priest (male, in the vast majority of the sects) sits on level A, in the congregation circle to the right of the altar. (There may be a slight upward slope there, to give him some height. The congregation arrays itself in the arcs of the two circles of level A, and the entirety of the two circles of level B. (Everyone should have a fairly clear view of the altar-level, above.) If there is a choir (official or unofficial), they will be in the level A circles.

No one is to sit on the steps leading to the altar level, or on the altar level itself. Indeed, that level is usually unswept and full of leaves! (The sole exception is if someone is an outsider who cannot be expected to know any better -- one's first seat in church is supposed to last the whole service, so an outsider who settles past the demarcation will simply be given frowns and gestures to sit at the foot of the stairs to the altar-level. Failure to do *that* gets disapproving frowns, but no action until after the service -- and even then, the confrontation is a purely verbal explanation that the outsider is being disrespectful.)

The priest leads the congregation in a song (almost always a traditional one in a dead language), arms uplifted, while the congregation moves in ritual choreography -- a genuflection to the center of the church, swooping to arms outstretched to the altar, and then the hands (still outstretched) are to describe the arc of the sky and back into genuflection to the center. This happens at various cue points in the song and is nearly impossible for an outsider to get right without aid or practice. It is, however, quite impressive to watch, especially in large, loyal congregations.

(Those who are unable to manage the genuflections are not required to do more than follow along to the best of their abilities; it is common for doctors to demonstrate genuflections which are appropriate for the injured or pregnant.)

After the first hymn, the priest sweeps his left hand outward, toward the "flock," covering first his arc (starting from his left) and then the one across from him. Then he stands, moves to the center and edge of level A, and repeats with his left hand for the lower circles on level B.

As the priest indicates, any volunteers stand to be recognized -- causing the priest to pause in the ritual -- and leap (enthusiasm is appreciated by the god) into the center of level A to perform, essentially, holy charades. Taking a scene from the WSHN bible, the participant(s) act it out, using any dialog from the biblical reference, but not descriptive text. It is fortunate that WSHN is considered to have a sense of humor, since some congregationalists will act out a scene which "didn't happen but should have," causing everyone else to flip through their bibles to find the presumed scene until the end, when the participant(s) reveal it was a made-up play.

It is also permissible to choose one of the long monolog sections from the bible, and read or recite a few passages of it. Again, it is permissible for someone to make up an appropriate fictional passage to "quote."

After the scene is over, the priest continues his motions, until the next volunteer(s) should arise. (Those on level B will climb up to level A; the priest stands aside to let everyone see their act.) Not every attendee need perform something; some worshippers never get up in services. Some prepare ahead of time, practicing their lines or role, and some simply leap up, divinely inspired. It is considered bad form for more than three people to create a spoof performance, though one which is both obviously non-biblical and greatly moving will be forgiven.

After the congregation's chance to perform is done, the priest leads the congregation in another song, gives a short reading of his own and/or a sermon, leads another hymn, and then stands in the center, facing the altar, and performs a traditional solo (singing or chanting). If time is short, everything but the solo is skipped. (It has been known for a priest with a tendency to drone to have the entire congregation each act out one of the holy scenes, forcing him to close out the service with the solo without actually preaching.) Noon services may take up to two hours, but an hour for each is preferred.

WSHN's Personality

WSHN is a mild-mannered god, as monotheistic creator gods go. He is deemed enjoy being entertained (thus the holy charades and permission for divine spoofs thereof, as well as the skylights, songs, and choreography), and is better known for His miracles of salvation and conversion than smiting the unbelievers.

This tolerant humor is supposed to be emulated by His followers, of course, especially when dealing with outsiders who mean well. Actually laying hands on anyone, even an outsider, is a vastly impolite thing to do in the House of WSHN.

He is also a creative god, favoring those who can both create beautiful things, and make their daily jobs -- no matter how mean -- a thing of beauty for at least those who do them. *Physical* beauty is less important; even the most gnarled artisan's hands may produce great weavings, paintings, or carvings. The ugliest singer may have a voice of gold. Inner beauty is more important than outer beauty. (An example: the story of *The Phantom of the Opera*, if it were written by a WSHNite, would have the mad Phantom redeemed by the love of his protegee Christine, while her wealthy boyfriend would either die justly for getting in the way, or realize the True Love before him and step aside. The Phantom would still wear a mask the rest of his days, but he would compose and sing in public, converted to the ways of WSHN.) One of the tenets of WSHN is -- in more flowery language -- the forbidding of wearing plaids with checks.

Fortunately for racial relations, most followers of WSHN believe that their god made multiple races because He wanted to look at more than one kind of human. This doesn't mean that WSHNites don't sometimes advocate segregation -- there's nothing to indicate that WSHN wants different races *living* together -- but the religion doesn't claim other races are sub-sapient. Followers of other *religions*, on the other hand . . .

He is, however, a patriarchal god, if a benevolent one. His precepts of protecting women have fostered and maintained the concept that women are too frail to protect themselves. And, as children should respect their parents, women are expected to respect and defer (in major matters) to their husbands and other men who follow the precepts of WSHN.

This *does* mean that an abusive man can be ignored, or an abusive husband divorced for being "displeasing in the sight of WSHN," though! Violence is supposed to be a last resort, and if an abusive spouse of either gender cannot prove that the violence is necessary -- not deserved, but *necessary* -- the abused spouse is granted a divorce and a large percentage of the property. The priest is granted a smaller amount -- 5-10% -- and any children will have their own amounts. Whatever is left over is left with the divorcee, who may be shunned by the community, depending on how he (or she) behaved during the (non-secular) investigation. Unfortunately, a very restrictive community can have unpleasant views on what is deemed "necessary," and lead to female and child subjugation, or even slavery of nonbelievers. When discovered, this can lead to a schism or a holy "re-education campaign" which can include necessary violence . . .

The Afterlife

In the WSHNian paradise, there are three levels of blessed soul: the Blessed who Rest, who have the forms of beautiful animals and are pampered, recovering from their hard lives; the Blessed who Sing, who are thought to send dreams to their families and sing every hour to the glory of WSHN; and the Blessed Angels, who may return to the physical world as spiritual messengers of WSHN, to perform miracles. Animals who are loved by a human are also transported to this heaven, so that the human will have even the non-human friends there.

WSHNian hell names the souls within it the Outcast Ones, who are trapped in the bodies of animals, forced to wander through a wasteland without water and with only thornbushes to eat from -- or each other, though an Outcast One will not die, and will heal when the other Outcast One moves on. (Their flesh will also burn the mouth of the consumer.) Eventually, once they have atoned enough for their misdeeds, they will re-enter the physical world -- still as an animal. If they are not loved by a human, then upon the body's death, their souls are extinguished. If they do win a human's love, they will be brought to Heaven with the human who loved them . . . provided, of course, that the human is a WSHNite.

Important Passages

The most common passages known (for reading or acting out) are ones of conversion, salvation, and romances between biblical ancestors or saints. Many of those latter tales have a certain Cinderella aspect to them: "And he looked last upon the blind weaver and saw that her loom bore the finest blanket / and Saul knew that this was the woman he had sought and he married her / And their children were . . . "

A typical salvation passage is where one of WSHN's prophets is, at a young age, captured and sacrificed by a rival tribe (or by his parents, because of conversion to WSHNism). The prophet prays to WSHN, and the wound is filled with a "godly light" which causes all present to shield their eyes or fall down in fear (or converted zeal), while the prophet makes his escape. His wounds are always seen to be healed when the light fades.

One of the most popular conversion passages describes how an outsider attended a service, and sat upon the stairs to the altar. The outsider then stood in front of the altar when the holy plays were performed, blocking it from the others, and generally behaved with an ignorant rudeness. However, the congregation was patient, and performed the holy plays anyway, and at the end of them, the priest turned to pass his hand over even the outsider, to grant him a chance to worship WSHN with the rest. Then the outsider realized the inclusive love of WSHN, and was instantly converted, rising up on bright wings to sing a hymn of praise (Number 43 in your hymnal) to the god.

The structure of the churches was revealed to one of the early prophets of WSHN as a way to bring together two warring factions within a town. The altar level was used then, but a later story tells how a priest turned away from the teachings of WSHN and preached ugly, droning violence and intolerance. WSHN sent angels who glared the priest from the altar-level (one pushing him with its finger at the final step) and told him that the god was not pleased with

such talk. Then they bade him entertain the god with pleasing song and plays, and arrayed themselves upon the alter (swinging their heels; or so many holy plays depict . . .) to watch. Ever since, priests have remembered that they, too, have an obligation to please the god and not lord it over their congregation.

There are also passages which depict the Sorrowful Necessary Vengeance of WSHN and His Prophets; WSHNites are by no means always pushovers, and have a few bloody crusades of conversion in their past. (Allegedly justified by the aggression of the non-believers, but then, history is always written by the victors.)

Using WSHNism in a Campaign

There are several ways to use WSHN and His followers:

- In a dimension-traveling game, WSHN can be the dominant religion in a neighboring timeline. Primarily, this will be nothing more than a source of strangeness, unless miracles are more prevalent and showy in that timeline than in the travelers' native one! Alternatively, the worship of WSHN (or the transformation of the dominant religion to resemble WSHNism) may be the only effect of their -- or *someone's* -- meddling with the timeline. At least, the only *noticeable* effect. Is there something sinister hidden in the heart of the WSHNian Church? For that matter, since when has the heart of the Church been in Poland?
- In a multi-deity campaign, WSHN can simply be the local god. If the gods are interventionist, other gods may be called Testing Angels by WSHN's followers: they are angels assigned to tempt people from the correct path and -- in actuality -- all supernatural powers come from WSHN. ("Yes, of course Della the Goddess of Spring is real -- but she is an angel of WSHN, and should be venerated as such.")
- In a futuristic setting, WSHNism may be the dominant religion of an alien species or human colony -- or it could be just starting! A few young men and women have named themselves prophets of WSHN, and are preaching His word . . .
- If WSHNism is a well-known religion, which the PCs nominally subscribe to, they may be called to resolve troubles, either as official Church Problem-Solvers, or simply responsible citizens. Perhaps an outsider has camped out on the altar-level, and the PCs are tapped to remove the outsider -- without unnecessary violence. Perhaps the PCs are coming through town, and discover that the local church is harboring a heresy -- harmless or appalling, at the GM's whim -- and they must decide whether to keep their heads down, or try to inform a neighboring church of the problem. Perhaps the PCs are travelers who discover they're at ground zero of the beginning of a holy war between sects! Do they help defend the town they're in (populated by peaceful extremists), or assist the other side to take over with a minimum of bloodshed?

Designer's Notes: GURPS Deadlands: Hexes

by Michael Suileabhain-Wilson

What excites me most about hucksters, the gambling spellcasters of *Deadlands*, is the way they come by their powers. Matching wills with dark spirits is pretty spiffy, and the cards are cute, but searching for esoteric lore in *Hoyle's Book of Games* makes something deep in my soul cackle joyfully and rub its hands with glee. I confess: I'm a bibliomaniac. My heart thrills at the prospect of diving into an ocean of paper in search of the good stuff.

This made it a lot of fun to write *Hexes*, but it also meant I had to work at keeping myself in check. The temptation to flesh out the role of books in *GURPS* in excruciating detail was strong, but the Powers That Be frown on loading down the system with armloads of new abilities and rules, no matter how cool they are. This is, I think, for the best; it compelled me to contain my bibliophilic frenzy to the page or two that was absolutely necessary to address the way hucksters work with *Hoyle's*, and save the space for hexes and templates and other good stuff.

What excites me most about Designer's Notes, however, is the fact that I'm allowed to throw restraint to the wind. So here I present all the fun crunchy and sparkly bits that I couldn't in good conscience put in *Hexes* itself: some new abilities, more rules for building a library to put Alexandria to shame, and a hex that was a bit too over the top.

New Advantages

Autodidact

3 points

You study from books quickly and thoroughly; as long as adequate written materials are available, you may study a skill on your own as if you had a teacher. If the extended Libraries rules below are being used, you may not raise your skill above the highest single library point rating in the Library you're studying.

Libraries

Variable

Those with a scholarly inclination tend to accumulate large collections of books covering their chosen field of interest. These collections serve as a resource for private study and as a source of information when their personal knowledge fails them.

Mechanically, Libraries are similar to Contacts (p. CI22). A Library has an effective skill and a degree of reliability, but instead of Frequency of Assistance, a Library has Research Time. Books are always available, but they may not be well-organized or easy to use. Research Time determines how long a PC must spend hitting the books before coming up with the desired information (or concluding that his library can't help this time).

One hour research time: triple cost

One working day research time: double cost

One working week research time: listed cost

One working month research time: half cost (round up; minimum cost is always 1).

Reliability works slightly differently for Libraries as well. Libraries can give false information, but they can't report your inquiries to the police.

Completely reliable: Only on a critical failure will the Library be totally unable to answer the question. On an ordinary failure, the desired information can be tracked down if the PC is willing to spend double the usual research time collating obscure references. Triple cost.

Usually reliable: On a critical failure, the Library will provide false information. On an ordinary failure, the PC may continue the research for twice the usual research time, after which the Library will roll again; if the second roll is a failure, the Library doesn't have the information needed. Double cost.

Somewhat reliable: On a failure, the Library doesn't have the desired information; on a critical failure, it provides false and misleading information.

Unreliable: Reduce effective skill by 2. On any failure, the Library provides false information.

Every Library has a particular specialty. A character's collection may span multiple fields of interest, but such a collection consists of more than one Library.

Quick Writer

2 points

You churn out words at an incredible pace. When writing books using the extended Libraries rules below, you may roll against Writing and the skill written about twice a week instead of once. A quick writer may still use the bonuses and penalties for a rush job or a leisurely project; a rush job for a Quick Writer involves rolling every two days, while a leisurely project permits him to roll every week.

Scholarly Aptitude

3 point/level

You were born for the academic life. Your level of Scholarly Aptitude is a bonus when you study Research, Teaching, or Writing: when you learn a scholarly skill, learn it as though your IQ were equal to (IQ + Scholarly Aptitude).

New Disadvantages

Aliterate

-1 points

You can read and write, but you don't like to. Written material longer than about a page is a crushing ordeal that puts you to sleep. You may not take the Writing or Research skills, and may not study from books at all.

Only Literate characters may have this disadvantage, and the base Literacy for the setting must be at least Semi-Literate.

Opaque

-3 points

You are extremely bad at conveying your ideas. Your attempts to explain things invariably wander into incomprehensible metaphors liberally studded with muttering and vague gestures. This habit should be roleplayed as far as possible without inciting violence from the other members of your gaming group. You may not take the Writing or Teaching skills. If the extended Libraries rules below are used, you may not write useful books.

Extended Libraries Rules

Building and Maintaining Libraries: Libraries don't appear out of thin air; someone has to find and acquire the books. Not every group will want to keep track of the details of this process, but for those who do it can add new dimensions to the game. Valuable books can be treasure, payment for services rendered, or even the main goal of an adventure.

If the group agrees to play out in detail the process of collecting books to improve their Libraries, the GM may rate each book collected with a certain number of library points. Each time a PC accumulates another 200 library points

worth of books in his Library's field, he may increase the value of his Library by 1 CP. This improvement may increase skill, improve reliability, or reduce research time; however, the GM need not allow every type of improvement. A character who has rounded up 200 books, each worth 1 library point, probably won't be able to reduce his library's research time. Of course, a Library's owner must be able to read a book in order to make use of it; the dedicated scholar learns several tongues in order to make use of all texts available.

These rules can also be used retroactively to work out the contents and values of the books already in a PC's library. This can be interesting for plots involving theft or damage to the library, but is likely to be more trouble than it is worth. Among other things, it invites the question of how many points a major university library is worth; sometimes leaving things abstract is for the best.

Writing Books: An author trying to write an informational book must make rolls against Writing and the skill he is attempting to write about at the end of every week of work. Success on both rolls means the book gains one library point. Failure on either means that the week was wasted making doodles and crumpling up sheets of paper. Critical failure on either or both means that the author has gotten stuck; the book may not be improved further. Critical success on either roll means that the book gains two library points. Critical success on both signifies a stupendous insight: the book gains three library points, and the book is free from the usual maximum limit on its library point rating until the author critically fails and stalls the book.

An author may not write a book with a higher library point rating than his skill level in the relevant skill or in Writing. A volume containing information on more than one skill should be treated as multiple books.

Writers may take advantage of the +3 bonus to Writing for a generous amount of time by rolling every two weeks instead of every week. They may also roll twice a week by accepting the -3 penalty to Writing for a rush job (see p. B48 for details).

Dogs Playing Poker

This hex allows a huckster on good terms with the nature spirits to summon a number of them to fill out the table when he plays poker with a manitou, and to take on the appearance of a nature spirit himself for the duration of the poker game. The hex gets its name because dog spirits are the type of spirit most easily persuaded to play a game with an unfamiliar mortal, though it's not unheard of to sit down to a game with a dog, a coyote, a raccoon, and an eccentric buffalo.

Nature spirits, like their manitou cousins, can't play poker worth a damn, but their very presence confuses a manitou badly - it's not sure who it's trying to beat anymore, and it sure doesn't know how to count cards. Frequently, a manitou faced with a six-way game of five-card draw with one-eyed jacks and suicide queens wild will fold before the game even gets going. This means that the huckster can dare to take on larger manitous than he usually would.

In game terms, a successful casting of Dogs Playing Poker allows a huckster to boost the hand of an immediately following hex by one level for every nature spirit summoned. The hex to be assisted with Dogs Playing Poker must be declared before either hex is cast. If the huckster fails to get even a hand of Ace on the boosted hex, Dogs Playing Poker does not take effect.

Some Sample Books

Hoyle's Book of Games: 8-18 library points in Occultism, depending on edition; 4 library points in Games.

Shaw's Guide for Gamblers: 18 library points in Area Knowledge (Weird West); 6 library points in Occultism.

A Short Treatise on Whist: 4 library points in Occultism; 3 library points in Games.

The Tombstone Epitaph's Guide to the Weird West: 13 library points in History; 3 library points in History: Esoteric.

The Ranger Bible: 20 library points in Area Knowledge (Confederacy); 13 library points in Occultism; 4 library points in History: Esoteric.

Sutherland's The Unquiet Dead: 8 library points in Thanatology; 7 library points in Occultism.

Washington's Neo-Zoology: 6 library points in Zoology; 5 library points in Occultism.

Blueprints from Darius Hellstromme's labs: 2-5 library points in Weird Science.

The Proscribed Manuscripts of Leonardo da Vinci: 25 library

Dogs Playing Poker has significant risks, however. If the huckster fails his casting roll on the second hex, the nature spirits will be angry that they didn't get to play after being called away from whatever they were doing, and will inflict backlash on the huckster. Worse, however, if the huckster suffers backlash while casting Dogs Playing Poker, he has inadvertently recruited a group of manitous to back him up, thinking them to be nature spirits. In this case, he must go through with the second hex. It automatically fails, and he suffers backlash once for every manitou involved - once for the manitou summoned for the second hex, and once for each "nature spirit" summoned.

Only a huckster with the Initiation advantage can learn this hex. Dogs Playing Poker can not be used to boost another casting of Dogs Playing Poker.

This hex introduces huge variability into hexslinging; it allows for immensely powerful hex results when it succeeds, and devastating trouble when it fails. Many GMs may not want to allow the chaos that this hex can unleash.

Time to Cast:	2 seconds
Duration:	Instant
Range:	Self
Hand	Number of Spirits Summoned
<i>Two Pairs</i>	1
<i>Straight</i>	2
<i>Full House</i>	3
<i>Straight Flush</i>	4
<i>Royal Flush</i>	5

Special Thanks

Unfortunately, the list of playtesters didn't make it into the book. I'd therefore like to take a moment here to thank Jeff Wilson, JT Benton, Frederick Brackin, Tyler Childers, Joe Deckert, Perry King, Jeff Raglin, L. Myke S., Ralf Tschulena, and everyone else who posted to the playtest.

Further Reading

- ["Look It Up!"](#) by Volker Bach: A whole bunch of interesting ways to use books in *GURPS*.
- ["Playing Unknown Armies By the Book"](#) by Chad Underkoffler: Though not directly applicable to *Deadlands*, this article has good stuff for incorporating books and libraries into your game in interesting ways.
- [Ars Magica](#): Perhaps the best treatment yet of all things scholarly and bibliographic in gaming.

points in Weird Science; 10 library points in Engineer (any).

The Black Heart of the Susquehanna, A Novel: 12 library points in History: Esoteric.

Aristotle's *Poetics*: 12 library points in Literature; 4 library points in Performance.

Newton's *Principia*: 16 library points in Physics

The Art of War: 7 library points in Diplomacy, 12 library points in Strategy.

Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management*: 3 library points in Savoir-Faire; 12 library points in Savoir-Faire (Servant); 4 library points in Administration.

Many hucksters and other scholarly sorts keep notebooks and other short manuscripts on their findings and observations. These texts are usually worth from 1 to 4 library points in their particular field; only rarely is such a notebook truly valuable, but they often contain good observations.

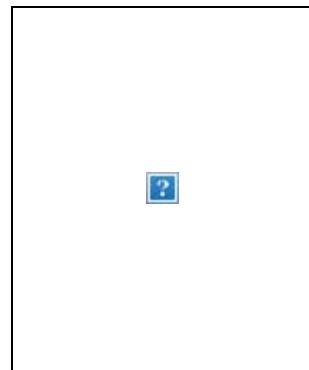
Pyramid Review

MechWarrior: Dark Age

Published by [WizKids](#)

Starter Set: \$19.95

Booster Set: \$9.95



Within the gaming fraternity, there is a common and continuing belief that the industry and thus their hobby is under threat from the surging popularity of one game or another. First it was a card game, and then it is the seemingly all-encompassing *d20 System*. But those who share this belief may soon see a new threat coming from another quarter altogether, just a few inches tall and sitting on a base that goes click! (Or should that be "Clix?") First there was *Mage Knight*, the collectible fantasy miniatures game that revolutionized wargaming, which was then made more self-contained and sent subterranean with *Mage Knight Dungeons*. WizKids then applied licenses to the concept and gave us the highly popular *Marvel HeroClix: Infinity Challenge* and *DC HeroClix: Hypertime*.

The latest version of the concept to go click is *Battletech*, with the release of *MechWarrior: Dark Age*, which is no surprise given that the names behind WizKids were those behind FASA. (This may lead some to speculate, with a version of *Crimson Skies* also forthcoming from WizKids, if we may see a version of *Shadowrun* similar to the *DMZ (Downtown Militarized Zone)* boxed game?) Fans of *Battletech* should be warned that *MechWarrior: Dark Age* is not the game they know and love from when it was under FASA's aegis; that remains licensed to and supported by FanPro as *Classic Battletech*, so they should rejoice that their favorite game has not been killed off by WizKids.

Where *Classic Battletech* is setting during the 31st century, *MechWarrior: Dark Age* advances the setting from its current date of 3067 forward into the 32nd century. In that year, Word of Blake zealots launched an attack across all of the Inner Sphere, where it took an alliance forged by Devlin Stone from many forces and factions, and almost a decade to stop the Word of Blake jihad. At its end, Devlin Stone took control of the all the worlds within a 120-light-year radius of Terra, and in 3081 established the Republic of the Sphere. Founded on a philosophy of peace, factional integration, and disarmament, its factories turned to non-military production, and the Republic's economy boomed. After 50 years as Exarch of the Republic, Devlin Stone withdrew from public life and vanished in 3130. When, two years later, four-fifths of the HPG communications grid went offline, planets throughout the Republic are thrown into darkness. With no news or explanation, rumors ran rife, decades-forgotten rivalries resurfaced, and newly re-formed factions rush to rearm as word of war looms and a new Dark Age hangs ready to fall over the Inner Sphere . . . Yet within the Republic of the Sphere, the battlemech is no longer the lord of the battlefield that it was. Most have been decommissioned, and many of those now fielded are industrial 'mechs used in mining, construction, agriculture, and forestry.

As with other WizKids games, *MechWarrior: Dark Age* comes in the now familiar Starter Set and Booster Set format. The tightly packed contents of the Starter Set consists of . . .

- eight randomly inserted plastic miniatures -- one 'mech, two vehicles, and five infantry units
- one 48 page black & white rulebook
- eight faction and background dossiers
- one special equipment card
- one flexible ruler
- one set of ID stickers
- three six-sided dice -- two white, one black

. . . and the Booster Set contains . . .

four randomly inserted miniatures -- one 'mech, one vehicle and two infantry units

The miniatures are the meat of the game and everyone will focus upon first. The figures are N-scale, they all come preassembled and pre-painted, and are thus ready to field in battle. Where the standard of painting on other WizKids releases has not always been as good as it might have been, the overall quality in *MechWarrior: Dark Age* is very good. The 'mech figures receive the best paint job, the vehicles less so, and the infantry less than that. Where necessary, pieces of clear plastic have been used for 'mech and vehicle canopies and cockpits, with decals fixed to denote factions. There is some degree of articulation on the 'mech and vehicle figures (in the shoulder and waist joints for 'mechs, and in the turrets for the vehicles). That said, purchasers should be warned that not every figure has this articulation, so a careful examination should be made before you get down and give your new figures a play and a twist.

There are a total of 116 figures in the first release, covering a mixture of 'mechs, vehicles, armored infantry, and ordinary foot soldiers. They come ranked as a green, veteran, or elite units, and sorted into five factions -- Brannson's Raiders, the Steel Wolves, the Spirit Cats, the Highlanders, and the Swordsworn. There is a mix of each faction in the set and players have the choice to build their forces along factional lines or mix 'n' match. Until they get heavily into the game and have more of the figures, the latter option is the more likely choice.

The use of N-scale allows owners of *MechWarrior: Dark Age* to purchase pieces of terrain relatively inexpensively. Although none is included in the game, owners of the game should be able to find some at their nearest model railway stockist. Until then, a number of terrain templates are included on the *MechWarrior: Dark Age* website.

To get a good mix of figures, a Starter Set and two Booster Sets were purchased for this review. Inside the Starter Set was a Centurion 'mech, a Demon Medium Tank, JES Missile Carrier, two units of Standard Foot (one veteran, one elite), and a unit each of Gnome, Hauberk, and Cavalier Battle Armor. In the first Booster Set was a ForestryMech MOD (an industrial 'mech modified to carry weaponry), DI Schmitt Tank, a unit of Gnome Battle Armor, and one of Peasant Company Foot. The second contained a Construction 'Mech, a Shandra Scout Vehicle, and a unit each of Hauberk and Cavalier Battle Armor. Overall, this was a decent mix, but the contents of both Booster Sets were let down by the fact that arms had snapped off both the ForestryMech MOD and the Construction 'Mech. This is a big disappointment, and even if repaired with a little glue, the figures will have been irrevocably weakened and require far more careful handling. This is also not a rare occurrence, as the local gaming store mentioned that this had happened to 'mechs straight out of the Starter Sets.

The combat dials are different for each type of figure, but all depict a similar set of information. This includes the figure's name, number in the collection, rank, point value (used for determining army sizes prior to a game), front and rear firing arcs, the faction they are commonly found in, their movement type, number of attacks, and the attack type. The actual slot found at the rear gives a figure's current score for their attack, defense, damage and movement values. Infantry sits on a standard one-inch diameter combat dial, and are the closest to the dials used in other WizKids games. The actual figures are either three suits of armor, five infantrymen, or a single hoverbike squad. The rear of this latter figure and of some other vehicles obscures their combat slot at the back, and the dials of the infantry figures are the stiffest to turn in general. Vehicles are mounted on two-inch wide by three inch long bases -- hover vehicles sit on a small plinth -- with the combat dial at the rear.

'Mechs are placed on over-two-inch diameter combat dials but stand in the forward half of the dial, which allows for a tumbler dial to be placed next to the standard combat slot. This tumbler dial is similar to those found in the treasure chests of *Mage Knight Dungeons* and measures the current level of heat for a 'mech. The numbers within the combat slot for all figures is sometimes marked with a colored box, which indicates a special ability, ranging from armor piercing and anti-personnel factors for ballistic weaponry, infiltrate and jump jets for speed special equipment, repair and improved targeting for attack abilities, as well as deleterious effects for ballistic, energy, and movement when a 'mech builds up too much heat. The information for all of these is neatly summarized on the full color Special Equipment reference card.

The rulebook itself is an easy read, and quickly leads you through how to play the game, so that one is ready to start within moments of completing it. You may not get all of the nuances of *MechWarrior: Dark Age* upon that first read

through, but its easy layout, solid glossary, and the handy Special Equipment reference card should all help get you through the first game or two. Essentially, each participant selects units up to an agreed point value in totals of a hundred points. Starter Sets contain enough to deploy a three hundred-point force -- most infantry units cost less than twenty-five points, most vehicles less than a hundred, and 'mechs varying greatly in cost, with some the elite 'mechs and the unique figures cost over 150 points.

Having assembled their forces, the battlefield is set up and the game is played. On a turn each player gives orders to their units, one for each hundred points their force total is worth. This can be moving a unit, ordering it to fire or conduct a special action. Markers or tokens will be needed to put beside a unit to indicate that it has taken an action during a turn. Should a vehicle or infantry unit be given an order on two consecutive turns, it has been forced or 'pushed' and takes a click of damage to reflect the fatigue inflicted. To get around the limited number of orders that can be made during a turn, the rules allow units to move and fire in formations, though 'mechs cannot be part of any such arrangement.

The flexible ruler is used to determine both movement and attack range. To attack, a player rolls the three dice, adds the attack value of the firing unit and attempt to get equal to or over the target's defence value. A roll of 2 on the pair of white dice automatically misses, while a roll of 12 is an automatic and critical hit that inflicts extra damage. This allows a player to hit targets with a defence value of eighteen or more.

Attacks come in three forms -- energy, ballistic, or melee -- and are not broken down into individual weapons as they are in *Classic Battletech*. Some figures have more than one attack and can target multiple opponents. They may also have -- and all 'mechs do -- primary and secondary attacks, which can each be of the three forms given above or in some cases be both the same. In general, the industrial 'mechs, except for those that have been modified with the addition of a weapon or two, have relatively few obvious advantages. These tend to be better at venting heat and inflicting more damage in melee combat. Military 'mechs invariably have the energy and ballistic weapon types. Infantry units have the advantage of actually being able to capture opposing vehicles and 'mechs, but must remain with the captured unit. Essentially, the game encourages you to think about using your units together, and brings all three types together far more effectively than the piecemeal fashion of *Classic Battletech*.

Damage scored upon a figure results in a turn of the combat dial, reducing a unit's effectiveness. Heat can also temporarily do the same to 'mechs, which is gained for running and from suffering damage inflicted by energy weapons. Every 'mech has a vent rating given on its combat dial, which allows it to bleed off heat if given an order to do so.

The rules also cover the placement and use of terrain, and possible victory conditions at the game's end. These can be more than a straight stand up slug between the opponents, such as controlling the battlefield or the opponent's deployment area. The rulebook ends with a detailed glossary and a note upon *MechWarrior* etiquette.

Both of the Starter and Booster Sets contain strips of ID stickers. These blank white circular stickers should be stuck to the base of the figures and marked so that an owner can easily identify those belonging to them. Their inclusion is a nice touch on WizKids' part. Further, the Starter Set includes a set of eight buff colored dossiers with white inserts that explain the basic background to the Inner Sphere of the 32nd century and some of the units and factions involved in the fighting across the Republic of the Sphere. These were a little disconcerting at first, but after tearing along a few perforated lines and making a fold or two, the dossiers make sense and are an attractive little feature. That said, it would have been nice to see more information on each of the vehicles in the game's first release; however, a full listing can be found in the Technical Readout on the *MechWarrior: Dark Age* website. WizKids has said that they may release more dossiers in the future, as well as more figures from the nations outside of the Republic of the Sphere.

It has been some years since I last played *Battletech*, although I have played quite a bit in the past and helped playtest a few elements that have since made it into *Classic Battletech* in some form or another. Yet time, space, an unexplored ability to paint and work with white metal all kept me from being more than a casual player before even that was killed stone dead when I finally went to university. Throughout, I still collected and read each new *Battletech* novel as it was released and so look forward to the publication of the first Dark Age novel later this year. That said, I am still hampered by time and space, but the release of *MechWarrior: Dark Age* serves as an excellent re-entry point back

into gaming within the Inner Sphere. There is almost no preparation required to start playing nor any painting needed at all. Within the game there is no paper work, although there is a little to learn in terms of the abilities and vehicle variants; this is all relatively easy, and the rulebook and the special abilities reference card are both simple to use.

Take two gamers each with a Starter Set, and they have enough figures to play out several games of ***MechWarrior: Dark Age***. What they get is a combined arms far future skirmish game that forces the player to integrate and think how they use their mix of 'mech, vehicles, and infantry. Beyond this, there is the "collectible" factor common to all WizKids games, allowing players to build the armies that they want. The game is let down by the problems of packaging and the damaged 'mechs, but this aside, ***MechWarrior: Dark Age*** is fun, visually appealing, and tactile. I must be hooked, because I am not only looking forward to playing some more, but also buying and opening more Booster Sets!

--*Matthew Pook*

Fightball



Published by [James Ernest Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest and Mike Selinker

Illustrated by Eduardo Müller

Two full-color 56-card decks; \$14.95

As happens so often after an apocalypse, desperate people come up with half-baked ideas for competitive sports to pass the time, usually cobbled together from what little information remains about the way things were done by the Ancients, or the Old Ones, or whatever they call the people who created and then destroyed society. In James Ernest's *Fightball*, old photos and incomplete records have inspired the people to create a variation of basketball that has teams of five using a variety of sporting equipment to try to score goals with any of several balls, all in play at once.

The object of the game is to score the most points. Two players, called Coaches, play four quarters. Each quarter is divided into the fast round, during which they play cards and try to score goals; and the scoring round, in which points for that period are totaled. Whoever's combined total is highest after the fourth round wins.

The mechanics will be familiar to anyone who has played James Ernest's *Brawl* game, but they are two distinct games. The action happens on a court built out of 24 cards (each team deck comes with 12 court cards), a circle two cards deep on every side -- think of a 5×5 rectangle with the center card removed. Coaches sit on either of the lengthwise sides. The three court cards next to each Coach are red; a semi-circle of blue cards surrounds those; then two "arrows" of green cards are wedged in from the left and right.

Play occurs in real time -- you're limited only by your reflexes. As soon as the game begins, start snapping cards. You hold your deck in your hand and play cards by pulling them, one at a time, from the top. If you cannot play the card, or don't want to, you may place it in your discard pile. If you later see a use for the discards, you can play them instead of drawing the next card from your deck, but you can only play the top discard. If you want a card from deeper in the discards, you'll just have to play your discards until you reach it. The last card in your deck is the Buzz card -- when you (or your opponent) draw and play it, that quarter ends.

You want to make complete plays, and you want a complete play to result in a goal. To make a complete play, you must lay, in order, a Player card (a character attempting a goal, also called a Shooter), a Ball card (the ball used), and the Shot card (putting the ball up for a goal). You must play Shooters in your opponent's blue and red spaces, but anyone can shoot from the green courts. The first card on a court card has to be a Player -- anything else is a foul and scores points for the other team. Once the Player is down, though, a lot of other cards can be played before the Shot. Opposing characters may Block, or Coaches may play Special Effects cards. Anything played on a stack after the Shot card goes down is also a foul, and will count against the player.

A complete play (Player/Ball/Shot) generates a Shot Value -- if the stack is worth 10 or more, your goal attempt succeeded. Less than 10 means you fell short or got blocked. Each card in a stack has a numerical value, depending on how it's used and where it's played.

The Player cards (the personalities on your team) all have a position to play, and six numbers down the side of the card. The first three numbers are for shooting: a Forward, as the name suggests, will have its highest value on a red court card (the closest to the opposing Coach), but their Shot Value from all the way back on the green courts is pretty

sorry. Guards are better from the middle (blue) or rear (green), and the centers play well forward but are pathetic in the green. Playing these cards according to their strengths gives you a better chance of making the goal.

The other three values on the card are for blocking; when you play a Player card into an opponent's Player/Ball/Shot stack on your side of the court, your Block Value depends on the court color. A forward shoots well in the red - he's right on top of the opposition -- but their red block stinks because they've got no business guarding their own goal. The Block Value is subtracted from the Shot Value.

Balls come in three colors as well, and provide a bonus if they match the court: a green ball played from the green court gets +2. Played anywhere else, a green ball won't change the total either way. The type of Shot card (not to be confused with a Player card's Shot Value) and its location determines its value in a play. A Long Shot card plays best from the green, while a Slam Dunk totals higher in the red courts. Played on a non-matching color, a Shot is worth significantly less.

Assuming everything is played in the right order, add the Shooter's Shot Value for that court color, the ball's bonus (if any), and the Shot card value for that court color. Subtract the Block Value of any characters your opponent slipped in on you. Special Effects cards must also be sandwiched in here (and they only take effect on a complete play). They may change the Shot Value, the points scored, or they may do something more dramatic like stop a play completely, change the players involved, or change where the action happens on the court. Sometimes a successfully played Special Effects card depends on the discards you've made -- for example, the Cruisers, known to cheat, may play the Sabotage card. Sabotage becomes any card you have in your discard pile at the end of the quarter.

Once either Coach plays their Buzz card, you take score. Incomplete plays are worth nothing (unless someone fouled), blue and red goals are worth 2, and greens are worth 3. If a Coach fouls by playing something other than a Player card first on a court card (called a False Start), the opposition gets points as if he made a goal from there (for example, if a Coach played a Ball card on an empty green court card, the opposition would get 3 points during scoring). If he played a card After the Shot (someone made a complete play on a space, and a Coach laid yet another card atop the Shot card), that foul is worth 1 point. Finally, you cannot play a Shot card unless there's a Player and Ball card down -- if you do, it's an Early Shot and, while play can continue if someone brings out the right cards, that faux pas will give the other team 1 point.

Like Brawl, the game plays at blazing speed. Unlike Brawl, it's not easy to keep track of everything. The first few games, players (including those who flatter themselves on their Brawl prowess) will probably play by taking turns just to get used to the rules; even so, the game is challenging, and you'll end up making a lot of costly mistakes. Once you've fooled yourself into thinking you've got the rhythm down, you can move on to fast play, a heart-pounding minute or two of your life. It takes a lot of practice to get comfortable, but even practice is a whole lot of fun.

The learning curve isn't a huge problem, but it isn't insignificant either, and oversights continue to creep in even after a number of games. You won't notice it while you're laughing and sweating, but it does wear on you fairly quickly. The strategy seems to be almost bottomless. For example, while the Shooter has to be the first card down, and it must be played in the opponent's zone, anyone can play the Ball, or even the Shot -- you can finish off their move for them, to their detriment.

As you might imagine, the game eats up a lot of space. The court cards have to be spaced out so you know which plays go in which stack. The slippery card surfaces let them drift a little (Eduardo Müller's artwork is terrific, though), and if you want to be able to see anything you've already played, you'll have to stagger the stacks a bit. Also, whereas Brawl allowed players to snap down cards on a central set of characters, there's a lot of bumping elbows across the dining room table here -- it's practically a contact sport. You're trying to play characters on the opponent's side while blocking his plays on yours, and vice versa. Maybe you're good at making stacks, but your clumsy opponent may cover the vital information you neatly laid out; that'll cost you valuable time just pausing to remember -- forget digging through the stack. And as awkward as the fast round is, the scoring round can be a real bookkeeping nightmare -- paper and pencil are highly recommended.

So far there are six teams, packaged two to a box so that two players can play with a single purchase: the Texas Wildcats vs. the Cruisers, Aztecs and The Dark, and Cavaliers and Team Sport. The Wildcats are a bunch of wannabe

cheerleaders, the Cruisers base themselves on gangs from the 1950s, the Aztecs take their motif from that culture (down to the human sacrifices), The Dark are the martial-artist creators of the sport, the Cavaliers are the musketeers of the Fightball set, and Team Sport is the rococo, anything goes gang that brings everything but the kitchen sink to the arena.

Fightball has imperfections, to be sure, and they aren't nitpicks. Expanding the ***Brawl*** mechanics to a larger-scale game brings problems, and players expecting the unfettered beer-and-pretzels pace of that game may be disappointed - you often end up having to make educated guesses about your options. The learning curve is pretty steep, but even that is entertaining for a game group willing to put the time and effort into mastering the moves. The game may be tiring to play, but it won't get dull anytime soon.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Looking For The One Good Thing

This week's installment is another one of those columns that screams, "Well, duh," to me, but I figure given the popularity of my column where I gave everyone [permission to make mistakes](#), I thought I'd at toss it out there.

This past week over in the chat rooms, someone made a comment that I accepted immediately on face value. The subject of various good and bad game systems came up, and we were discussing some bad games (or at least games with bad bits). Someone pointed out that a good GM can make *any* game fun, and I accepted this (or at least didn't make any negative commentary); indeed, this is a concept I have thought in the past, and espoused to my friends in private.

But something about that comment stuck with me; despite my Mothra-esque ego regarding my own abilities when it comes to GMing, I considered how true that really was. *Could* a GM who was locked in a Siberian prison with two former Nazi generals and a Chinese poet turn a session of SPI's 1980 soap-opera-based *Dallas* game into a rip-roaring fun time, provided he's really, really, *really* good?

So after contemplating this notion, I realized there may be more going on here than meets the eye. In our cast of characters sitting around the gaming table, what can make or break a game?

GM

A good GM can certainly improve the odds of a game being enjoyable. If he is able to set the tone right, control the pacing, get the characters involved with exciting plots and dialogue, and ensure that all players have an amount of game-time similar to their desires, then that game will probably be more fun than a Disneyland automaton droning off a preordained script, pausing occasionally for player input or wax cylinder changes.

But it is possible for the GM's importance to be overstated. No matter how good a GM you are, you probably can't shine if your players are completely unenthused and would rather be playing *Everquest*. (There's a reason that we have paintings of dogs playing poker, but not dogs playing *Unknown Armies* . . . think about it.) The GM is, to use an extended analogy, the director; if the actors don't like what they're doing, or the screenplay is weak, or the key grips aren't . . . um . . . gripping keys, then it's entirely possible the production won't work, despite a genius at the helm.

The Players

Coming from personal experience, one good *player* can turn an otherwise lackluster game into a fun and memorable experience for all. What defines this hypothetical good player can vary from game to game, depending on what is deficient, but some examples include:

- Drawing in the other players ("Wait! I know you're the party leader, but this is a *mage* we're talking to . . . they're mysterious! Let's get Wallflower the Wizard to try and get the information from him . . .")
- Knowing the rules as a tool, not a weapon ("Well, according to the rulebook, a 20-foot fall should only deal at most 12 points of damage . . . but if you say I broke my ankle, that's fine. I'm *sure* it'll make for an interesting story element . . .")
- Spurring discussion of the problems faced by the party
- Good acting and characterization (although not overacting or bulldozing the other players)

Of course, it's also entirely possible that one *bad* player can ruin an experience for everyone . . . but we won't dwell on those, lest we subconsciously give someone bad ideas. In that circumstance, hopefully the GM (or the other players) will talk with the person, and work to make the game better.

The Game

Now, there is certainly some truth in the idea that a good GM and players can make even a lackluster system fun . . . but the converse is also true: A fun system can make up for deficiencies in both the players and GM. For example, if the gaming group likes the idea of gaining new powers and abilities all at once, then a game like *Dungeons & Dragons* with its "leveling up" aspect will provide periodic thrills for all its players continuously.

Of course, this is directly dependant on the definition and compatibility of "fun" for all playing. If half the players love leveling up and the other half hate it, then there's going to be a problem if the game system contains leveling up. (Naturally, this possibility for conflict really isn't much different than having a gaming group that consists of Those Who Hate Doug, and Doug.)

Anyway, since RPGs are, at their core, games, it stands to reason that a game with more enjoyable rules can make for a more fun experience. Again, speaking from personal experience, the Chaosium *Ghostbusters* game from the mid-80s was *incredibly* enjoyable for us. Despite my complete inexperience as a GM (and my players' inexperience with gaming), we were all able to have a good time with it; how could we *not*, when the books were fun to look at, the rules were simple, straightforward, and often funny, and you got to keep track of your inventory with those neat cards? On the other hand, there are game systems out there I wouldn't dream of trying to run at all; despite over a decade of gaming experience, I know my limitations, and I know I probably wouldn't have fun with those games. (Although one may argue that perhaps one of the ways a good GM can make any game fun is recognizing which ones not to play . . .)

Situation

Finally, let's say you've got a good group of players, a good GM, and a good system, and you're all ready to play. There's only one problem; you're all on fire.

The gaming situation can be the invisible "player" when it comes to gaming. You can have all the pieces together for a fun time, but if the environment isn't comfortable, is distracting, or interferes with the gaming experience, then it alone can ruin the game. *But* a good environment can elevate an average game with average participants to something truly memorable, whether it's a horror game done by candlelight; a strategic sci-fi game done in a room with blacklights, a black tablecloth, and futuristic-looking colored tape; or a mystery/intrigue live-action game done in a real jazz nightclub. (Of course, again, someone generally needs to *think* of these ideas . . . although that could be the GM, a player, or a Humble Columnist.)

In all, although it may be correct to say, "A good GM can make any game fun," it is perhaps better to say, "A good _____ can make any game fun," where a bunch of different ideas can be plugged into that slot. Many factors can contribute to a game's success *or* failure; don't look to one person to elevate a game to fun, but look at yourself and see what you can do to make it a good time for all.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: *The Apocalypse Stone* (for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*), p. 3.

(Three stars)

"25. Give Anyone a Creamy Nougat Center!

26. Flatulence of Life! (Your Gas Revives Dead & KO'd)

27. Give Someone Complete Trivia Mastery Over a Specific Topic!

28. Summon Buddah!"

Heat Wave

The Rookies Begin

by Michele Armellini

This is an introductory adventure starting a campaign with beat cops as PCs. Beat cops are less flashy than FBI agents, and creating a campaign for them can be challenging. It has its own rewards, however, or at least, opportunities -- some of which closely linked to what might seem just problems.

The GM should talk with the players about a cops campaign. If they seem to think *Lethal Weapon*, this isn't the right setting. They want to be at least detectives, or maybe SWAT agents. However, if they mention *Hill Street Blues* or *Adam-12*, then this is the setting for them. [GURPS Cops](#) is the recommended sourcebook, and pages CO41-42, CO45, and CO77-80 will be very useful; but the adventure is described in generic terms, and the GM can use it with his preferred ruleset.

Pitfalls And Opportunities

A campaign focusing on beat cops has a few problems of its own. Instead of being deterred by them, why not trying to see them as opportunities?

- The biggest problem is that a cop's job is thankless and repetitive. The officer responds to a burglar alarm, and discovers it was a faulty siren. He spends half an hour for a routine car accident. Then he stops in a bar. Then an abused wife calls for help -- it's the fifth time she calls. This isn't cinematic.

However, these situations will sometimes develop. The alarm actually signals a burglary. A drunken celebrity was driving. A brawl erupts in the bar. When the cop arrives, the abused wife is dead. In all these circumstances, the beat officer is the first one on site. Albeit briefly, the PCs will be the only ones who can take critical decisions (see p. CO77).

Also, when nothing interesting happens, that could be considered as an opportunity for . . . *roleplay!* If the players like interacting with colorful NPCs, developing their personae, entering in a fictional world featuring as many meaningful relationships as casual gunfights, this is the place for them. The siren was faulty, but the house owner is angry because the response was slow. The drunken driver is a colleague's father. The bar provides interesting gossip. The abused wife has made up her mind; in time she'll fall in love with the cop and become a Dependent, but her husband will become an Enemy!

- Another stumbling block is that beat cops work alone, or sometimes in pairs. If the playing group is large, this can be a problem, as two players at most will be involved in the action. Again, the way out is also an opportunity for roleplaying variety. The GM could prepare a few "scripts" for minor NPCs, and let them be played by the non-committed players! The script should include the usual character data, but also a few clear directions about what the NPC wants, knows and usually does, and what the PCs should get from him. The fringe benefits of this "outsourcing" is that no NPC will now know more than what he realistically could, and that the players won't easily accuse a NPC of railroading them. Of course the GM will step in if the player goes overboard.
- Finally, a beat cops campaign is inherently low-key. There won't be one arch-villain with world-shattering plans, but many small-time hoods committing petty crimes and a few ordinary citizens committing occasional misdemeanors. It is also inherently episodic: most gaming sessions will feature facets of some recurring problems (such as the continuing activity of the local drug lord). What's more, even the big stories a cop can sometimes stumble into will be whisked away: the beat officer finds the body, but it's the detective who investigates.

Well, there are two things to keep in mind: the players should get their low-key rewards, and the campaign might develop. The rewards are the same of a real-life policeman: if at the end of the day the PCs have survived, made the neighborhood a bit safer, put away some thugs, and had some good time with their colleagues . . . they should be satisfied with that (and get character points). If, however, the players grow restless, the campaign may develop! Do they want to be detectives, or SWAT agents? The GM can fast-forward three years, tell the players the first three sessions were a prequel; now it's the day of their detective examination, or their first day of training as SWAT members! After having seen the front line, they'll be much better investigators or specialists.

Heat Wave

In this large city, either beat cops work in pairs, or the Department has the rookies spend some time paired with experienced officers (normal practice in most cities). The PCs should all be rookies, unless there are many players; in this case, the more experienced players can be the mentors, and the rookies will be naturally gifted, making up in attributes what they lack in skills.

A city map will be handy (preferably, a real city). At least three beats (see p. CO34) should be defined within the precinct area, an inner-city bad neighborhood.

A mighty heat wave is expected. As experienced cops will say, this climate also brings a surge in crimes.

Rookie Day

Rookies with a contact in the force know that on rookie day (their first shift), pranks will be played on them. When they show up at the precinct, the desk officer tells them to hurry to sign in and get their "hardware" (see p. CO60-70), because roll call is earlier than originally scheduled. So the rookies have no time to check the equipment, and they are shoved into the muster room, already packed with veterans slouching in their chairs. Sergeant Malone perfunctorily welcomes the newbies and rattles off assignments.

Suddenly a madman barges in. He seems an old beggar, but he also wears a tin foil turban and carries what seems a toy death-ray gun with blinking LEDs. He shouts about the mind-controlling orbital stations and points the "gun" around.

This is a prank, but also a test. The madman is actually Tim, Sergeant Malone's brother-in-law, a former cop and the owner of *10-7* (radio code for "out of service"), the local cops' watering hole. As he rambles on and acts threatening, the veterans hang back and feign fear, waiting for the rookies to react. These have been given unloaded handguns and spent capsicum cartridges.

Sergeant Malone watches them closely, to see whether they are confused, scared, or if they use excessive force. He stops the prank before it goes too far, but the rookies will get their chance of behaving sensibly -- or of making fools of themselves.

Cool rookies could notice the veterans don't seem convincing, and they could wonder how the madman got past the front desk. They might also see that one of the veterans did not stand up and, after the joke is over, he's smirking rather than laughing. He's Harry "Smiley" Roberts. Sergeant Malone will not team Roberts with any rookie too eager in drawing the baton.

Down To Business

Cross-Over Digressions

The GM knows his players' preferences. Maybe they love Horror adventures, and they accepted a cops campaign mainly because the GM proposed it. Or they're willing to try something different, but Horror remains their cup of tea.

Why not indulge them? Whatever the setting, if everything runs smoothly there'd be no adventure. An anomaly will occur. And if it seems dangerous or weird, who will be called in? Beat cops.

So a cops campaign is an ideal crossover starting point. The GM might add just that bit of the good old flavor that will make the players happy. Or a 50-50 ratio, for a real crossover. Or, a campaign could begin as a cops story . . . and continue as anything else.

Sergeant Malone resumes the briefing (see p. CO41). The main issues are an increase in shoplifts at the mall, and the expansion of drug peddling to the "Main" (the most important road in the district). Officers are expected to "react."

The roll call ends quickly. With another round of laughs and jokes, the rookies are given ammo. The pairs drift to the chainlink-fenced parking. The heat is already blistering and air conditioning is not functioning in all cruisers.

Once the cruisers have left for their beat, the GM will feed the cops random encounters; with more than two players, he may employ the "script outsourcing" method, above.

Random Encounters

During the eventless lulls between these encounters, the veterans will act as tour guides, introducing persons and places, recalling memorable events, and issuing cautionary advice; each veteran in his own style. A constant refrain throughout this hot day will be that as the temperature soars, so do the tempers. The "Pitfalls and Opportunities" section, above, provides more sample encounters.

Some of the encounters are designed to give way to developments in subsequent sessions.

- The drug peddlers are out in force on the "Main." Their M.O. is to work near a side alley, so that they can run away if challenged. If apprehended, they have no dope on them -- because for every "point of sale" there are several look-outs (as well as gun-carriers) and the stash is hidden somewhere in the alley. The cops can disrupt the trade, maybe catch somebody red-handed, but the gang boys (many of them are minors) will sneer, knowing there's little the cops can actually do. If, however, an arrest is made, the cops will need to bring the boy to the precinct, book him in, and later do the paperwork. There will be some silly, short celebration for the rookie's first arrest.
- An armed robbery is reported in a liquor store! When the cops arrive with their guns ready, they'll find two senior citizens in a fist fight. In the cramped store, it won't be easy to sedate the two drunkards without hurting or being hurt by them, or bumping into the bottle-laden shelves. The owner reported a robbery because, otherwise, the cops take an hour to show up. If the cops don't tell him off too harshly, he may realize he "owes them one" and recall that in another session.
- A citizen reports a burglary. As it happens, the thieves thoroughly rifled through his possessions but only took his hard-disk drive and diskettes. The guy is sweating and nervous; he says he's a free-lance journalist writing an article about *them*. He says *they* shadow him, but he won't be able to tell the cops much more. Another nutcase -- but while leaving, alert officers would notice an unmarked van across the street. It was there before, the driver is sitting in it. If the cops come close, the van leaves at once; somehow, the plate is unreadable. Is the paranoid actually being stalked? Maybe the cops will want to keep tabs on the man, and possibly try to extract some more info about *them*.
- A cruiser is summoned by the mall security. The surly agent has cornered two despondent girls (both under 18). They were stealing lingerie, but the surveillance camera film is grainy and unclear. The agent swears he's seen them drop the loot when he challenged them; they haughtily deny everything. The shop manager wants to press charges, but he suddenly changes his mind when the father of one of the brats shows up. He's a local big shot, and he smoothly convinces the manager to accept his "apologies and -- *gratitude*." The man can also imply there is "gratitude" for the cops too, but he'll stop short of open bribery. Different veterans will have different reactions (see below). There is little the cops can do . . . but they might well remember the brats and watch out for them.
- A Rottweiler is risking death in a locked car parked in the sun. Nobody seems to know who the owner is. A veteran might know how to open a door without smashing a window, and have in the cruiser the tool to do that; he might also wait and see whether the rookie goes for the window. In both cases, a loud alarm goes off, and the owner shows up, furious. He shouts he was going to come back in time. It turns out he's the hated landlord of a few slum buildings, and that's why somebody called the police in the first place! The encounter might end with a scuffle (with a weakened but still aggressive attack dog ungratefully siding with its master!), an arrest, and some long-lasting enmity.
- An urgent call comes in, the dispatcher reports a kid called because "dad is killing mom." When the officers

arrive, it's the crying kid who opens the door; the father is in shock, he just repeats "I killed her." The kitchen is a bloody mess, the weapon used is a frying pan, and the victim lies with her head in a pool of blood. Actually she's not dead -- yet. The cops should check that! If they provide first aid, and they timely call in an ambulance, the woman will survive. This crime will let the PCs learn the ropes about procedures within a simple case. If they save the victim, that should be worth both in-game rewards and character points. The kid may well reappear later.

- The officers stop for lunch (possibly meeting with another pair). The eatery owner welcomes them cheerily, whether he knows them or not, and offers them free food. Then he hints they should hang around, as "those gangsters" are showing up and disturbing the patrons. Maybe the PCs, and any veterans, uncompromisingly want to pay for their food . . . or not. If they accept this basically harmless deal, this will lead to ramifications in later sessions, either with the owner, the "gangsters" (maybe just unruly kids), or the newspaperwoman who happened to be there for lunch, too.
- Several cruisers are ordered to take part in a car chase, initiated by another precinct's men. This can be as long and complicated as the GM wants. It may just end on its own, with the sirens fading in the distance and the cops being told to return to their beats, or it might end with the PCs cornering the fleeing car in a dead end, making arrests, even participating in a gunfight. This would be the once-in-a-while exciting moment of this first session, used as a finale. An alternative finale can be a cut to a cheery scene at *10-7*, where rookie day will end with the rookies jokingly taught another cop's skill -- drinking.

Another Non-Person Killed

This is the beginning of a potentially satisfying plot thread that can go on for a few sessions; this event should take place just before the closing scene.

A cruiser is ordered to an abandoned warehouse because an anonymous caller reported a body. The first cops there, including Slater, will have a good look, but many others will also be sent in to comb the area for clues, and cordon out busybodies.

The victim is a wiry, unwashed kid ("a runaway," says Slater), his head smashed. Slater notices something: "Look at the knees. He's kneeled in this sawdust. This reminds me of that streetwalker . . . she'd kneeled, too, her nylons were torn." Another veteran will reply there's no connection: in that case, the victim was a woman, and killed with a gun. If Roberts is present, he'll make some coarse joke as to the reasons why a prostitute's stockings could be torn. But Slater looks thoughtful.

A thorough search will yield a lot of junk, and a clue: a spent camcorder battery (after the usual exams, no fingerprints at all will be found, but, interestingly, this battery only fits very early models, which could be useful to narrow the field).

Actually, there is a serial killer around. He gets his kick from the godlike power of killing (that's why he has the victim kneel), so the prey's sex is irrelevant; the only thing his victims have in common is that they are non-persons, people nobody cares for. Indeed, apart from the kid and the prostitute, he's also killed a mentally-retarded orphan and two homeless beggars. He uses different weapons (a pistol, a wrench, a knife, a garrote), he wears gloves. Adding that the victims fit no profile, he achieved the remarkable result that nobody has realized yet these are serial murders. The killer compulsively *needs* to videotape what he does, so that he can later replay the scene for himself. He hunts throughout the county, but he lives in the neighborhood, and he made the mistake of hitting there twice. So Slater is alerted now. He won't be able to convince anybody, neither Malone nor the Homicide detectives; but he will begin an unofficial investigation on his own -- and he might recruit a couple of bright rookies.

The Precinct's Old Hands

These NPCs are described in generic terms.

- **Sergeant Terence Malone.** He may seem the gruff-but-fatherly kind; actually he's just gruff, hardened by years

on the streets, and determined to run the precinct with as little disturbances as possible. He's got very little patience for incompetence, unnecessary violence, idealism and corruption -- in that order. As a cop, he's unimaginative but stubborn and thorough.

- **Harry "Smiley" Roberts.** An experienced beat officer, he's also a bully and a closet racist -- who never smiles. He's been the target of many complaints about excessive force, and enemies in the Internal Affairs. He sincerely believes in "shaking up" suspects as the main avenue to clues, and the local hoods give him a wide berth. He might soon become a sergeant, save that Malone isn't giving him positive marks. He's not helpful with rookies, apart from recalling firefights, difficult arrests, and dirty tricks. Indeed, he carries a "drop gun", just in case he shoots somebody who's unarmed.
- **Luis "Pancho" Martinez.** A swarthy Hispanic, he does his job reasonably well and he doesn't want complications; his definition of complications includes policewomen. He's a very clever driver and part-times as driving trainer for a security firm. He hates his nickname.
- **Richard "Croaky" Slater.** The most intuitive officer in the precinct, Slater just flunked the detective exam. His colleagues' jokes about it aggrive him no end. He hates criminals, which can become a liability if his intuition lets him down in judging a suspect. Unsurprisingly, his voice is croaky!
- **Thomas "Not-on-my-shift" Johnson.** He's an overweight, sweaty time-server who will avoid "excessive" workloads whenever possible; he might teach a friendly rookie some of his tricks, and preferred crib spots (see p. CO52). He's not corrupt, but he will accept "little favors."
- **Alfred Washington.** With just three years in service, this broad-shouldered black officer will be the most sympathetic with the rookies. He's eager, earnest, and a workaholic, he lives in the neighborhood, and he does community work. He's a strictly by-the-book cop, which might become a nuisance at times.
- **The dispatcher.** She's just a nameless, sexy voice on the radio, but when things get tough, she also comes through as collected and experienced. Actually, she knows what the beat cops need because she was one, until the shootout that disabled her. Maybe the rookies will come to know her . . . another day.

* * *

*(Special thanks to Lisa J. Steele, author of **GURPS Cops**)*

The School of Tobaccomanancy

A New School of Magick for *Unknown Armies*

by **Brian Rogers**

Tobaccomanancy, despite its associations with smoke and fire, is actually a school centered around deception -- lying to the senses, lying to others, and ultimately lying to yourself. In retrospect, smoke and fire have always been the trappings of illusion, so maybe that isn't such a strange fit after all. Regardless, the smoke, the flame and even the cigarettes are secondary to the true paradox of Tobaccomanancy -- gaining control over the perceptions of others by lying to yourself.

Tobaccomanancy is a by-product of Madison Avenue advertising: telling you things that aren't true to get you to spend what you haven't got purchasing things that you don't need. Cigarettes have become central to the school because they embody the apex of that deception. You're buying into the myth that smoking makes you cool, hip, fashionable, suave, beautiful and popular. The currency you're handing over is your health. Smoking gives you a life by taking away your life, but even that is superficial: it's all about the image and self image.

Tobaccomanancers are called Smokers. A Smoker's Magick is based on making people perceive things as being true because the Smoker wants them to, or by making it so the world and other people cannot deceive them -- Smokers are so adept at lying to themselves that others pale in comparison. Targets see you as cool because that's how you see yourself. They can be made to see themselves as you see them, giving them courage, sapping their will, or setting up a wave of self-loathing. You can make things appear valuable when they're not, or vice versa -- this does not directly translate into a desire for ownership, but an acceptance of their value as a fact.

Classic Tobaccomanancers are addicted to nicotine. This has a lot of long term deleterious effects that are left up to the GM -- most likely body loss -- which should build slowly in game. Smokers who go without smoking for an hour suffer penalties as ascribed by the GM, but most likely a minor reduction (capping at 5-10%) in Speed and Soul skills (including Tobaccomanancy) due to the withdrawal.

The school has an affiliation with smoking because it is the easiest entry point. There are Tobaccomanancers who don't smoke, having found other self-deceptions to power their Magick: bad romances, dangerous overspending, and so on. While these adepts don't see themselves as Tobaccomanancers the schools are functionally identical: non-Smokers just have a different way to get their minor charges.

Tobaccomanancy Blast Style: This is the wave of self-loathing mentioned above. The Tobaccomanancer has to treat the target with a visible and obvious gesture of contempt (blowing smoke in their face and flicking cigarettes on them are classics), and that contempt is momentarily taken as fact by the target. This sets up a cognitive dissonance, shattering their self image and causing temporary or permanent psychological/psychosomatic damage.

Stats:

Generate a Minor Charge: Smoke a pack of cigarettes. For non-smoking Tobaccomanancers, other methods of harmful self-deception (conspicuous consumption, illicit affairs, and the like) serve the same function.

Generate a Significant Charge: Get a group of other people to buy into your self-deception -- convincing people that you are as suave, cool, or beautiful as you think you are sets up a positive reinforcement loop. The group must be at least 5-20 people, and you can only harvest them once per week. Of course, if the group finds out that you aren't what you've led them to believe, this will permanently sour them -- you probably just violated a Taboo as well. Tobaccomanancers cultivate these groups, trying to keep them separate to prevent the collapse of one from souring the whole string.

Generate a Major Charge: Get millions of people to buy into your personal myth. How? Become the head of a major business without the skills to do it. Star in a hit movie with nothing but attitude. Convince people that something that's killing them is actually not bad. (You have to believe it yourself -- why do you think all the tobacco execs smoke, and have no problem telling Congress there's no evidence against smoking?)

Taboos: There are two -- having enough substance not to need the image, and having the self-deception unravel. The former means that Tobaccomancers can have no skill higher than their Tobaccomanancy (if you actually live up to your image, the self-deception doesn't matter). The latter can be someone publicly and demonstrably revealing your deceptions, failing in an humiliating way in front of people who know you at things central to your image (fear the BOHICA!), or worst of all, admitting that things you've claimed about yourself just aren't true.

Random Magick Domain: Image. Classic Tobaccomancers add fire and smoke, while the non-Smokers add aspects central to their own self-deception.

Minor Formula Spells

Blowing Smoke (up Your Skirt or in Your Face)

Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: A key Tobaccomanancy spell, this works by letting people see themselves as you see them, giving a temporary modifier to their skills by changing their self-image. Depending on how you see the person, you can give them a +/- 5% modifier on either a single Soul skill or their Obsession skill (these being the skills most dependent on self-image), chosen when the spell is cast. This lasts for a number of rolls equal to the ones digit on the spell check. For each additional minor charge you blow on this, you can give them an additional +/- 5% modifier.

Halo of Smoke

Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: The core Tobaccomanancy spell -- making people see you as you see yourself. After casting the spell you gain a +20% on your next skill check whose outcome depends on the opinion of people witnessing it. This includes any social interaction, but also things like appearance or any physical attempt to look graceful or cool. Your actual skill chance doesn't change at all, just people's willingness to see whatever it was you did as being a success.

Gesture of Contempt

Cost: 2 minor charges.

Effect: This is the Tobaccomanancy minor blast. In addition to the standard rank 5 stress check against the Unnatural, the target also has to make a rank 7 stress check against Self to fight off the overwhelming wave of self loathing. If they succeed, they simply lose their next action fighting off the effect. If they fail, they take Minor Blast damage from the psychological trauma, though this damage heals with an hour of rest.

How Cool is That?

Cost: 2 minor charges.

Effect: This spell makes people value something or someone as you value it. The object in question hasn't changed, but anyone who sees it will simply know that your 1995 Escort is a hell of a hot car, that your off-the-rack suit jacket is a stylin' fashion statement, or that the girl who just blew you off is as sexy as Marjorie Main. This spell is focused on the object and lasts for 2-5 hours. It won't make anyone desperately desire the object or pony up money for it on the spot, but it gets the object on the table as an item worth having. The effect fades after the spell ends, so Tobaccomancers who cast it on themselves to attract the interest of beautiful people will find themselves on the receiving end of "Why did I bring you home?" stares the next morning.

A Step Ahead

Cost: 3 minor charges.

Effect: Looking like you know more than you do is a big part of image. This spell gives the adept an edge, making you seem in the know. Here's how it works: when you enter into a new social situation, you cast the spell to get a positive answer to one important question. The question need not be answered immediately -- it will hold itself for up to an hour waiting for the first positive response.

Example: Paul walks into a crowded bar for a meet with an as-yet-unmet contact. He casts A Step Ahead to ask, "Who am I supposed to meet?" If the lady is already there, Paul spots her instantly. If she isn't there yet, the spell holds rather than give him a negative answer. If she shows up in the next hour, the spell points her out to Paul the moment she enters. Paul casts the spell again when they sit down to talk, since that's a new social situation, and asks "Is she lying to me?" If it doesn't go off during the discussion, Paul knows she's playing straight with him. If she does lie he'll know it instantly. However, the spell has just given him its one positive answer: if Paul presses her and she feeds him a new lie, he's out of luck -- since this isn't a new social situation, he can't recast A Step Ahead even if he did have three more minor charges.

Significant Formula Spells

All That (and a bag of chips)

Cost: 1 significant charge

Effect: For the next 30 minutes, anyone watching or listening to you will think you're the coolest thing since . . . well, ever! This gives you a bonus similar to that given by Halo of Smoke, but it's a 20% increase on every such roll for All That's duration. Tobaccomancers can try and double dip on this, casting Halo of Smoke while All That is active, but failing the skill roll for Halo of Smoke will shut down both spells. This spell can be extended for another 15 minutes for an additional significant charge, added at any point and with no roll required.

You Little Worm

Cost: 1 significant charge

Effect: This is the Tobaccomancy significant blast, where you really shatter someone's self image. The stress roll is now at rank 9 Self, but if they make it they lose their next action rather than take significant blast damage. Targets can die from the psychosomatic damage of having their self image shattered.

Smoke Ghosts

Cost: 2 significant charges

Effect: The Tobaccomancer is able to shift the perceptions of either 1 person he can see, or all people within 25 feet, making them sense things that aren't there. The target's senses must be somehow reduced for Smoke Ghosts to work -- dim light, fog, smoke, excessive background noise, etc. The Smoker can only affect the target's reduced senses (making them see things in fog, hear things in a noisy room, etc.). Smoky, crowded bars are perfect for Smoke Ghosts, as the targets are hindered in sight and hearing, and possibly smell and touch. The illusions are clear but not detailed. There are clearly lurking people in the smoke, but they are impossible to identify; there are voices clearly talking about the target, who can't place their voices or make out more than the occasional phrase. During the spell's 15 minute duration the smoker can modify the illusions as he wishes, even jumping from one sense to another, but it requires most of his concentration to keep them going. If that concentration falters, the illusions stop until the Smoker starts paying attention again.

One of a Kind

Cost: 2 significant charges

Effect: The older brother of How Cool is That?, with One of a Kind you can permanently change the perceived value of a person or thing. Again, it doesn't make any physical change to the object, instead it changes how important it seems. Tobaccomancers can use it to make influential people less important in the public eye, make everyday items into rare collectibles, or turn nobodies into borderline celebrities. Tobaccomancers will often cast this spell on themselves, reinforcing their image, but this has a serious drawback -- if you ever violate a Taboo, the spell shuts down. That's right: for everyone else it's permanent, but for you it's just good until the next hideous BOHICA. After all, your opinion of others is much stronger than your opinion of yourself.

Superimposed Self-Image

Cost: 3 significant charges

Effect: By engaging in even a very short interaction with your target you can permanently bring their self image more in line with your image of them. This lets you increase or decrease any self image/interaction skill by an amount equal to the total of your roll. You can only improve a person once with this spell, but you can cut them down any number of times in any number of skills -- we're all more willing to believe the worst about ourselves, after all.

Tobaccomancy Major Effects

Perfectly enhance or utterly destroy the image of a person or organization. Appear to succeed in everything you do for a day. Gain the ability to assume the quintessential image (but not appearance) of any type of person at will. Convince the world that something is unquestionably true.

Paul Milk, Pool Hustler/Tobaccomancer

Personality: Paul craves attention -- positive or negative. He loves being respected for his skills and will coast in any circumstances where he's receiving that. He seldom applies himself. Paul cares about people, but half of his caring is just needing to be around them.

Obsession: Popularity and charm based on cigarette smoking (Tied to Tobaccomancy)

Fear Stimulus: Being totally alone. Paul spent much of his formative years socially and physically isolated, and being utterly without human contact still kicks the stilts right out from under him. (Isolation Meter)

Rage Stimulus: Being ignored, shut out or dismissed. Paul doesn't mind being insulted or belittled, because that's still attention -- being ignored or dismissed out of hand sets off years of suppressed rage.

Noble Stimulus: Helping the isolated or lost. Some people -- specifically his mentor -- gave him support, and now he does the same for others. He strives to maintain a "do as I say, not as I do" approach with children.

Attributes

Body: 44 (Rail Thin).

General Athletics (15%), "Get offa me!" (15%), Barroom Stamina -- Paul can drink, smoke, play pool and generally hang out in bars for hours with no visible effects (22%), Intriguing Appearance (22%)

Speed: 66 (Graceful).

Drive (15%), Duck and Run (15%), Pool (44%), Suave -- graceful and slick, Paul is good at looking smooth and in control (22%)

Mind: 50 (Looks for angles).

General Education (15%), Notice (33%), Street Sense (32%)

Soul: 60 (Charming).

*Hustle (20%), Charm (20%), *Tobaccomancy (50%)*

Violence:	2 Hardened	1 Failed
Unnatural:	2 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	2 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	0 Failed

Background

Paul Milk grew up in eastern Fairfield County, Connecticut. Geeky, pudgy, and introverted, he felt isolated and alone for most of his schooling. In high school he fell in with the "smoking" crowd. While not actually that bad, they were as bad as suburbia got and made Paul a part of seedier society. Nicotine sloughed off his baby fat, and his lean frame improved his self image and grace. His social skills improved with his acceptance and his compassion made him attractive to girls. Most importantly, he had a gift for pool, the preferred game of the smoker set.

Without the cigarettes he had been a nothing, a loser, a shlub. With them, he had friends, skills, and a good chance with women. There was a kind of Magick in them -- that "realization" was his discovery of the path of Tobaccomanacy.

What set him on that path was "Coffin" Joe Malone, the hustler at the seediest bar in nearby Bridgeport. Paul challenged him once. And again. And again, sure that he would become a disciple to the master. Joe saw the boy's obsession and adopted him as an apprentice. Paul received Tobaccomanacy instruction and acted as Joe's messenger in his side business as a numbers runner.

When Joe felt the cancer coming, Paul found himself cast off -- given the address of a bar called Josie's and told to never, ever come back. Paul suspects that Joe didn't want Paul to see him sicken and die (but it could easily have been something fare more sinister). He still worries about Joe while knowing in his heart that his mentor is dead.

Derek, Josie's bartender, was waiting with a letter detailing a job as a mob boss' leg man: the pay was a room above the bar, an open tab at the grill, \$50 a week and rights to a pool table -- any profits from that table were gravy. The job demanded loyalty and no questions. Paul has been very good at both, grateful for his acceptance in a hierarchy and the bar's little society. Josie's is apparently only distantly owned by his boss, and Paul has managed to convince the staff, regulars and himself that he is a player in a large criminal enterprise. (This group acts as a source for significant charges.) It's worked out well so far; Paul is makes a good living with no expenses and all the cash he can hustle.

Given that Paul himself does not know who he works for, GMs can slot him into any campaign as an agent of just about anyone: potential ally, competent enemy, or information source, Paul does it all. If the GM wants to bulk him up for any one scenario he could be riding along with, or in charge of, one or more of his boss' combat worthy employees: Paul makes a devastating backup to talented enforcers, able to get them information and pump up their self-images before the big fight, as well as being a good ace in the hole with an occasional Blast.

Mangaseya

Ghost Town on the Kara Sea

by Volker Bach

Where the estuary of the Tas river opens into the Kara Sea, north of the Arctic Circle on Siberia's icebound north coast, lie the ruins of a city that once was a vibrant center of commerce, home to thousands of fortune hunters, a staging post along the route to find the mythical Northeast Passage to China, and the target of English colonial ambitions -- Mangaseya. Today, only few and scattered remains rediscovered by Russian archaeologists some 400 miles from Salekhard tell us of the place. In the heyday of the Siberian fur trade its name was a byword for sudden wealth and rugged frontier spirit.

Mangaseya Then

Mangaseya was founded in 1601 by a group of Cossacks in an effort to secure the lower Ob for their Muscovite overlord. The fate of the small fortified outpost -- originally intended to show the flag and cow the native Samoyeds -- changed when the sea passage from Archangel through the Barents Sea and the Yugor Straits south of Novaya Zemlya was opened up. Russian and foreign (mostly English and Dutch) traders braved the dangerous waters to gain access to Siberia's "soft gold."

Fur had been a mainstay of Russia's trade since time immemorial and, from the fifteenth century on, a jealously guarded government monopoly. In the years after 1600, however, Russia was wracked by crisis. Following the death of Ivan the Terrible's son Fyodor, several contenders rivaled for the crown. Boris Godunov, the former tsar's first minister and de-facto power in the state, initially succeeded, but was replaced in 1603 by a pretender claiming to be Fyodor's son Dmitri. Though he was quickly driven out, a second pretender attempted the same feat only a few years later. Not before 1613, with the coronation of Mikhail Romanov, did the time of civil war, famine and depredations end and Russia could begin to reassert order.

Of course, Europe's fashionable world was hardly prepared to wait for their furs until the political situation had cleared up. Traders ventured beyond the Moscow fairs to Archangel, and on to the source of those precious goods -- Siberia, and its raucous entrepot, Mangaseya. Especially the English Muscovy Company (earlier the main channel of the famous diplomatic exchange between Elizabeth I and Ivan the Terrible) made a fortune by circumventing the Moscow government's duties.

Mangaseya in the 1610s and 1620s is described by contemporaries as a "Siberian Baghdad," a place of uncountable wealth and glamor. Placed on the coast of the West Siberian Plain, a vast frozen expanse of treeless heath, the city was built from timber shipped in over the sea from the Kola peninsula or down the Ob from the southern taiga. Almost everything needed for the inhabitants to live -- tools, clothing, even food and fuel -- was brought to them during the summer navigation season. In return, merchants came away with the rich furs Europe demanded in ever greater numbers -- sable, ermine, fox, squirrel and otter. The Mangaseyans themselves bartered these from the Samoyed and Ostyak nomads for iron kettles, copper wire, liquor, and other glories of civilization. A far-flung trade network along the rivers and caravan routes of Siberia brought in furs from more distant places as demand outgrew the local supply. Soon, other goods of the Far East -- fossilized mammoth tusks, walrus ivory, Chinese silk and porcelain and Central Asian carpets and brocades -- found their way here.

Little remains today of the city that, like other Siberian settlements, was most likely built around a central fort and surrounded by palisades separating Russian and native dwellings. Timber loghouses -- rarer here than in the forested taiga further south -- served as dwellings for the wealthy while the poor had to make do with huts dug into the frozen soil. Irregular dirt streets and no public works worth speaking of -- we do not even know whether the original Mangaseya had a church -- completed the picture of haphazard growth.

The city's inhabitants were a mixture of Russian settlers; drifters; foreign merchants from England, Persia, and China; and native slaves. The lifestyle was very different from that of European Russia, where wealth was enjoyed in private and forelocks tugged to the mighty. The rich of Mangaseya lived in barbaric splendor, holding court in their garishly painted timber houses surrounded by veritable harems of slave concubines and troops of servants. During the summer season, when the sun barely set for months on end, visiting traders were treated to lavish hospitality. Banquets of the best European delicacies combined with local fare -- sturgeon, berries, venison and caviar -- were eaten seated on perfumed rugs before going to sleep in beds of silk and sable fur accompanied by beautiful Samoyed girls. In all-night drinking bouts mixing the finest vintages of France with fierce spirits, fortunes in furs and silks were traded for gold. The poorer settlers -- factors, Cossack guards, inland traders and servants -- lived in earth and timber huts in a strange mixture of grandeur and squalor. Most of them kept slaves -- concubines, servants and their families -- and dressed in furs that, in Europe, would have been beyond the means of even a wealthy burgher. Yet they might not have a stick of wooden furniture nor have eaten (imported) bread in years. The poorest -- natives, mostly -- lived in leather tents around the palisades scraping a meager living from the harsh land. Many of the Samoyeds who settled in Mangaseya had become hopelessly addicted to liquor, living only from one bottle to the next until they sold their families and themselves into slavery or died.

In winter the city was almost completely isolated. The rivers and sea froze for months, trapping anyone unlucky enough to overstay until the next thaw unless he wanted to brave the snowbound tundra in a native dogsled. Temperatures, having reached 80°F only months before, dropped to -40°F and the sun barely rose over the horizon even at noon in December. The Russian settlers bartered with native hunters bringing their catch into the city, fished, hunted, and staved off the arctic cold and boredom with gambling, alcohol, and sex.

Mangaseya was a strange mixture of Russian, Western, and native cultures. Semi-savage Cossacks dressed in reindeer skin and fox fur carried to market a fortune in gold they just earned from Dutch or English merchants while stone-age nomad hunters rubbed shoulders with Europe's navigator-explorers. Society was stratified harshly. Natives were treated cruelly even by the standards of 17th century Russia. Traders paid a pittance for their valuable furs if they bothered paying at all. Often, they extorted the goods by threats or through hostage-taking. What authorities there were took part in this, squeezing their subjects for "tribute" to sell on their own account. Both liquor and torture were used to bring down prices. Driven to despair by poverty and alcoholism, the Samoyeds and Ostyaks were forced to sell themselves into slavery where they suffered every whim and drunken rage of their new owners. There was no shortage of new slaves, and native lives were cheap.

The Russian government disapproved of all this. Moscow wanted the fur trade to be handled as a state monopoly, channeled through specified factories and with high duties levied on it. After the end of the Troubles, they undertook to first control and then entirely shut down Mangaseya's business. In 1619 they forbade all ships to enter the port. A coastal fort was built to enforce the prohibition, and sea charts were even forged to make the city seem inaccessible by depicting Novaya Zemlya as a peninsula. By the 1630s, Mangaseya's trade had slowed to a trickle. The merchants moved to richer grounds, caravans once again brought their goods to the stageposts of the southern trade route across the Urals to Moscow, and in 1645 the last government functionaries were removed from Mangaseya. In a bizarre incident, Russian troops burned down the remains of the city and resettled its inhabitants for no apparent reason in 1678. Memory of it was soon lost. Only in the 1970s did natives guide Soviet scientists to the place they called "Tagarevyard" ("the destroyed city") to find the ashes of what was once a great seaport.

Mangaseyan Adventures

Mangaseya is a wonderfully strange and exotic place for adventurers to go to. Merchants or mercenaries might come for profit, explorers in search of the fabled Northeast Passage could winter here, agents trying to spy out the (jealously guarded) secrets of Siberia can use it to enter the forbidden country and mages to seek out the mysteries of shamanic magic at its source. Smuggling (illegal, but highly profitable) guns and blades to sell to the natives for (equally illegal) untaxed furs can be challenge enough. The treatment of the natives is another point. Players will probably be angry about this and heroic PCs could easily be moved to free an abused young Samoyed girl from the claws of her Russian tormentor -- with all attendant consequences. In a *GURPS Russia* campaign, Mangaseya is a good place to meet Westerners and get rich, or to escape the attentions of the government and church.

A world-spanning *GURPS Swashbucklers* adventure could make it a stepping-stone on the way to China for heroes unable to use the sea route. An entire campaign could be filled by joining a caravan across Siberia, from the frozen tundra through the steppe dominated by fierce horse nomads and the great deserts to the Amur basin and China -- a journey of two or three years.

The long winter months also make an excellent plot device if the settlers have to get out for some reason. Crossing hundreds of miles of snow in dogsleds, though snowstorms and almost complete darkness, should tax even the hardest of adventurers. Add to this the difficulty of getting a reliable guide and the simmering hostilities between Russians and natives and you have plot hooks aplenty. Convincing a party of Samoyed hunters encountered in the middle of nowhere that you are not one of their Cossack tormentors is a true test of diplomatic skill even if you speak Samoyed - and who does?

Mangaseya could also be played from the other side. The heroes are Samoyed hunter-gatherers (effectively TL0) faced with the random cruelty of Cossack patrols, the burdensome demands of tribute collectors, the debilitating effects of liquor and the sweet seduction of new, fascinating gadgets from the legendary place where the tents are made of wood. This game could even end with the PCs leading a native uprising against the oppressors. To design this kind of campaign, GURPS Ice Age or GURPS Low Tech are invaluable.

Alternate Mangaseyas

The historical Mangaseya flowered in an ecological niche briefly afforded by politics and the economy. Once conditions changed, its short moment of glory was over. Under other circumstances, its story might have read very differently.

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, European cartographers speculated that there might be a navigable passage to China north of the Asian continent. Russian, English, and Dutch explorers entered the White Sea in search of this Northeast Passage which, eventually, proved a costly mirage. In a world where such a passage exists, Mangaseya would be a major staging post along the route. Timber, tar and food could be floated down the Ob to be sold to passing merchant ships. Siberian furs bound for China would be loaded on the great Dutch and English vessels taking supplies. Politics, too, would envelop the fate of the city. A Russian garrison might try to enforce tolls for using the passage, and whenever European nations went to war, their corsairs and warships would prowl around the port in search of rich pickings. In a war with Russia, Mangaseya on the Northeast Passage would make a tempting target for an invasion force, far from any relief force and open to the sea. Of course, once the timber city has been bombarded and burned and your marines are ashore and have taken the fort, you will have to survive the winter here . . .

Surviving diplomatic papers seem to indicate that King James I of England briefly considered annexing Mangaseya around 1610. Such an ill-considered expedition would likely have come to grief had it been tried (especially after 1613, when Russia's central authority was restored), creating little more than a brief flash of anger in Anglo-Russian relations. It just might have worked, though. Given a longer period of anarchy and the chance to establish a stable bridgehead, the English would probably have favored freer trade and stopped extorting "taxes" from the natives, preferring to buy their furs for cheap trinkets. This could have secured them the goodwill of the local Cossacks, traders, and natives, making a reconquest over land difficult (no attack over sea by the primitive Russian navy would have stood a chance against the guns of English men-of-war). By 1660, Russia had fallen so far behind the level of technology that an English colony on its soil could have continued almost indefinitely. Cutting off much of the profits from Siberia (Russia would have to compete for the trade rather than monopolizing it) could in turn make the reforms of Peter the Great impossible. Russia would stay a Polish and Swedish vassal state and buffer zone against the Turks while China and Persia (and later, British India) dominate Central Asia. By 1850, a broad swathe across the continent from Ceylon to the Arctic could be painted British red, with Mangaseya the gubernatorial summer residence of British Siberia.

Over all this speculation we should not forget the supernatural side of things. Mangaseya lies at a crossroads of cultures and faiths, and with all the horrors perpetrated throughout Siberia to get the furs that passed through it, it must be full of vengeful spirits. The entire history of Mangaseya could play out under the *GURPS Voodoo* rules as the

conflict between a powerful Anglo-Russian Lodge and an alliance of Samoyed shamans! Ritual Magic (either the rules from *GURPS Voodoo* and *Old West* or those from *GURPS Spirits*) lends itself to this style of campaign. Nature spirits angered at the immoderate hunting of sable and ermine could as well be responsible for the decline of the city as geopolitics, and this victory of the underdog could appeal to some players for closing a campaign. Even a campaign that does not center on supernatural should not ignore the way the city and all its surroundings are suffused by suffering and violence. Nothing spiritual could fail to respond to this background radiation of pain. Even the success of Mangaseya itself might come from supernatural sources. Sudden wealth extorted from oppressed natives, a decadent and brutal lifestyle, and an equally sudden fall from dizzying heights are all the hallmarks of a demonic bargain. This could also serve to explain the enigmatic burning of the city's sorry remnants by government troops in 1678. Of course, whatever outworldly power drove Mangaseya then is not likely to have simply gone away . . .

Mangaseya Now

Today, Mangaseya is an archeological site and -- like most real archeological sites -- dull. The tundra is still lonely and hostile, inhabited by a few native hunters who kept the memory of the great city alive (to warn others to stay away?). Even today, nobody who does not have to visit the Tas estuary. No systematic excavation of Mangaseya has been undertaken, nor is one planned. However, across the great Ob estuary lie fields of natural gas that Russia is exploiting. The conflict between natives and Russians -- engineers and businessmen rather than fur hunters and tax collectors -- still simmers.

While it is unlikely that anything valuable was left in Mangaseya after it was abandoned and burned, it is just barely possible. Walrus and mammoth ivory, traded through the port in great volume, are hardly affected by age and would still represent considerable wealth, as would gold and jewels. If adventurers came by papers suggesting that a large store of any of these had been hidden in Mangaseya in 1620, they could be tempted to go on a treasure hunt in 21st century Russia replete with adventuring possibilities.

Mangaseya in a *GURPS Cliffhangers* campaign would be a very different place. Rather than charcoal traces and scattered metal and pottery artifacts, the city has left behind its garishly painted houses perfectly preserved like a frozen Pompeii under layers of frost and snow. Inside, furniture and accoutrements have been kept intact by the cold, down to the starved watchdogs on their chains. In this city haunted by vengeful ghosts and spirits (*GURPS Undead* is full of possibilities), historic manuscripts, and dark secrets might still lie about for the unwary (or a well-informed PC) to pick up.

Even today, Mangaseya might still contain Things Man Was Not Meant To Know, whether it is the demon the original inhabitants bargained with to gain power and wealth, or the curse the shamans laid on the town. The Russian Mafia could be very interested in the former; sacrificing a few virgins rather than selling them into prostitution is no big deal if you get phenomenal wealth in return. Preventing this, or stopping them, will be a challenge for any investigators, and may require locating the Samoyed shamans who stopped the thing the first time around (or their descendants. They could not still be alive after 350 years, could they?). Alternatively, there might still be a curse on the place that counteracts European business and technology. Given that there probably are large natural gas reserves under it, this will also get interesting.

Whatever its shape and form, flavor and texture, Mangaseya makes a fascinating locale for a wide variety of campaigns. Whether as a raucous, vibrant frontier town or a hellish slave pen, a labyrinth of antiquities encased in snow and populated by monsters or an empty wasteland on which to clash with armed mafiosi and native insurgents, it can challenge and intrigue players in the 17th century as well as the 21st. Go East!

Pyramid Review

Gamer Tycoon

Published by [Agents of Gaming](#)

Rules and Editing by Bruce Graw

Card Design and Layout by Pamela Mosby and Rob Glass

Art by Mitch Foust

Developed by Pamela Mosby

100 cards, 1 six-sided die; \$14.95

Gamer Tycoon is a card game from Agents of Gaming that allows two to seven players to enjoy the thrill of running a game company, and the ecstasy of crashing and burning as your lines dry up, one after the other, leaving you with nothing. So long as you've got less nothing than anyone else, you'll live to publish another day.

The object of the game is to be the richest player (relatively speaking -- this is based on the game industry, after all) by game's end. Everyone starts with one card from each of the three decks. You get an Industry Classic, which represents one of the gaming mainstays of the business similiar to *Dungeons & Dragons* or *Traveller*; a Market card, representing the many forces at work on the industry; and a Games card with the new and shiny releases from your company. All players start with \$50,000 to run their company (\$100k in a two-player game) or run it into the ground. Then the players (they recommend whoever has the most pennies in his pocket goes first) take turns putting out games and trying to create the biggest hits in the biz.

At the start of each turn, you Pay Maintenance: Each game has a cost to bring it to the table and most have a cost to keep it up; if you can't maintain it, fans lose interest and you lose that line. This won't matter the first turn, when you don't have any cards out, but you have to plan for it in future rounds.

You then try to improve your business (or take your competitors down a notch) with Market Cards. Maybe your game was a hit at the convention or with magazine reviewers, or you got a movie tie-in. Your opponents' games, on the other hand, were badly edited, or the collating was off and no one got all the right rules pages. Some of the cards are a straight hit to the pocketbook and require you to cross some money off your tally, while others affect the money die roll in the next phase. If you're not confident in the market forces at your disposal (in other words, your card hand bites cold steel), you can opt to discard Market cards in pairs -- every pair discarded is worth +1 to a money roll later that turn.

Your labor bears fruit in the Get Paid! phase. Industry Classics are worth a straight \$10,000 each (unless it has Expansions). For everything else, you have to roll (the game comes with a little six-sided die). The higher your roll is, the more money you get back. The games are divided into genres -- Miniatures, Children's Games, CCGs, War Game, RPGs, and Board Games -- and having the only game out in one genre means you get a +1 bonus to the money roll for that game (when you're the only action in town, everyone must buy your line or go without). If you have three different genres, you get a +1 to any and all money rolls for that turn (diversity is a good thing). Rolling a 1 means the game tanks and you lose the line. If you were fortunate enough to attach an Expansion to the main game, you may choose to simply discard the expansion ("They never should have published the Fur Trapper prestige class . . .").

The money you make is used to Buy Cards: \$20,000 for another Games card and \$10,000 for a Market card (if you get an Event, you play it immediately). Once you have your new and improved hand, move on to Put Out Games. If you can cough up the startup cash, you can lay out new games or create Expansions for old ones to increase their value. If you already have a game in a particular genre, you'll get a discount to represent all the experience you gained (and the mistakes you made) the first time you ventured into that niche. Any Industry Classics you have are free plays, since that's what put your company on the map. Play passes to the left.

When the last card is drawn from either the Market or Games decks, the drawing player is taking the last turn of the game. When he's finished, everyone counts up their money and the market value of their products and supplements, and the highest total wins. At least, that's the game in theory.

The truth is, the cards are a stack of errata. One, and only one, card has a cost for bringing a game into play and another for maintaining it during Pay Maintenance. The rest give you only the figure for bringing it into play, and presumably the same figure must be used for maintaining it, meaning you'll pay as much in maintenance as you did to get the game out, and everything will come down to the die rolls. Add an expansion to a game and you'll be paying another \$10,000 in maintenance fees -- that means the cheapest game in the set has to roll a 2 each turn just to break even with its maintenance costs. That's a pretty pricey hedge against losing the game altogether to a roll of 1. Maybe it's an accurate reflection of the industry, but the lumps in the economics make for a disjointed gaming experience.

You have to get a game out, otherwise all you have to fall back on is your Industry Classic, and if its maintenance and profit are the same, it won't change your fortunes at all. Since you don't roll on a Classic, you won't lose it to a roll of 1; the rest of your stuff isn't so lucky, so it's hard to put out more games. Classics do not appear to be immune to loss due to an inability to pay the maintenance, however, so some bad investments by you or unkind Market cards played by opponents may force you to lose it as well. The rules don't even address being bankrupted, so it seems there's a rule or clarification missing.

The designers obviously were going for that midrange price that's so popular these days. The game comes in a small, hard-plastic container that fits everything nicely. Be careful -- the slick plastic slides smoothly open, so either flip it over (so you must maneuver the case over the cards) or grab the top firmly to keep the bottom from falling out [insert your own game industry joke]. The cartoon artwork is a good fit with the game's wry sense of in-house humor (a Recession card improves the money-making rolls), but the rest of the graphic design is iffy (the rules are printed on three of the 100 cards that come with the game -- the oversights indicate the rules could have used a little more space). The back of the case even tells you you'll need a six-sided die . . . unless the die that came with it is covering that part of the advertising blurb. Huh.

Agents of Gaming has a nifty idea here -- *Gamer Tycoon* is simple, it's colorful, and it should, by all accounts, work. It doesn't, however, and if it takes an errata update just to get things moving, *Gamer Tycoon* may be destined to fail as an ironic example of art imitating life.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Fantasy Busine\$\$ Card Game

Published by [Eurogames/Descartes USA, Inc.](#)



Written by **Christophe Boelinger**

Illustrated by **Emmanuel Roudier**

Translated by **Frank Branham**

\$16.95

Each day a party leaves the proverbial fantasy city bound on some great expedition or mission, whether to root out some great evil or just delve into some dungeon that needs an ethnic cleansing or two. Of course, every expedition needs outfitting and equipping, and this is where the players come in, as merchants in Fantasy Busine\$\$\$. They are the owners of a simple stall in the bazaar or of an adventurer's outfitters, each bidding on various items and then attempting to sell them for as much profit as possible.

Fantasy Busine\$\$ is part of the Blue Games range from French publisher *Descartes Editeur*, released in English by Eurogames/Descartes USA, Inc. The publishers claim that each of the Blue Games series -- of which *Fantasy Busine\$\$* is the sixth title -- "is fast, clever, amusing, simple to set up and simple to play." *Fantasy Busine\$\$* itself is designed to be completed in about 30 minutes by three to eight players, ages 12 and up. This places it squarely in the Cheapass Games bracket, at least in terms of design, if not in price and quality of components. These consist of 48 item cards, 24 special cards, one First Buyer card, two Player Aid cards, a pad for setting prices, over a hundred plastic tokens representing the kingdom's currency and a four-page rulebook. Both the rulebook and the cards are done in full color, and the game even comes with a light cloth bag to hold all of the coins. The item cards come in eight types -- Healing Herbs with a base value of two, Bow & Arrows and Spell Components with a base value of three, Swords valued at four, Horses and Armor at five, and Magic Potions and Spell Scrolls at six.

Setting up the game begins with giving the youngest player the First Buyer card. They will act as banker for that turn before passing it on to the next player on their left. All players receive ten crowns apiece as well as a setting price sheet. Finally, all of the item and special cards are shuffled together, and the two Player Aid cards are placed where anyone can see them. One of these cards shows the crown value of the plastic tokens -- necessary, as they are blank, and the other shows the four phases that comprise each turn.

The first phase is the bidding, which begins with the First Buyer drawing as many cards as there are players and laying them down on the table -- face up for item cards and face down for special cards. The First Buyer selects one of these cards and makes an opening bid. The player to the left may raise the bid or pass, and so on around the table until all have had a chance to bid on that card. The highest bidder takes the card, putting it down on the table if an item card or in his hand if a special card. That bidder can no longer bid on new cards during this turn. Bidding continues until all the cards have been bought and any left over are discarded. It pays to wait until some cards are gone, as this reduces the competition, though the advantage of being the First Buyer is that you control the order in which the cards are bid for.

In the second phase, the sales prices of the various item cards are sorted out. This must be equal to or more than the base value of an item, but not more than double the base value. Players are free to agree upon a price between themselves for any of the items, but they then can renege on that agreement and sell at a lower, more competitive

price. The final price decided upon is noted down on the price fixing sheet.

At the beginning of the third phase, each player announces their selling price as the items come up. All those selling an item at the lowest price receive this amount plus two crowns per item card, whereas the highest selling price makes nothing at all. Any prices set between the lowest and the highest receive that amount only. The turn ends with the fourth phase in which the first buyer passes the First Buyer card along to the next player.

One complete game of *Fantasy Busine\$\$* lasts 10 rounds if there are six or less playing the game, but only eight rounds if there are seven or more players. The player with the most crowns, plus the base value of the item cards they hold is the winner at the end. Ties between players with the most money are settled in favor of the youngest player.

So far so good, but what keeps *Fantasy Busine\$\$* from being just another bidding and selling game -- apart from its fantasy theme and the production values, that is? The answer is the 24 special cards -- distinguished from the item cards by their pale gray-green bands. These are worth bidding on, although their true nature is only revealed after bidding closes. There are 13 types, each of which tells you when they can be played and under what conditions. Some cards prevent a player from bidding, or any bidding at all during the first phase, steal from or swap cards with another player, spy on all other currently held special cards or even on the prices set by each player on their price fixing sheets, so that you can take advantage and change your own! Despite the limited selection, these special cards increase the interactivity between the players in *Fantasy Busine\$\$*. Further they can actually be used as part of the price-setting negotiations in phase two to threaten your competitors! Unfortunately, there is no special card that can be played to counter the effects of a special card played upon you. Although there is nothing to stop you from creating your own, there are no blank cards included in the game.

The longest part of the game -- and probably the most fun -- is actually the price setting in phase two. I suspect that those could become quite protracted, making a full game longer than the suggested 30 minutes playing time -- especially if they migrate away from the table for secret meetings! Then there is the backbiting and machinations as everyone backs out of a deal in order to undercut the opposition . . . but then business is business, even if it is *Fantasy Busine\$\$*.

--*Matthew Pook*

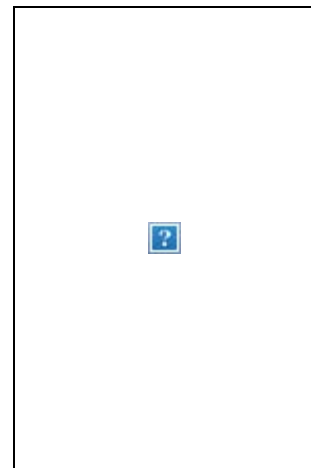
Pyramid Review

[Reading The Vampire Slayer: An Unofficial Critical Companion to Buffy and Angel](#)

Edited by Roz Kaveney, 2001

Tauris Parke \$14.95

296 pages; ISBN 1 86064 762 6; \$14.95



With the *Buffy The Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game* in stores now, many referees are building and developing their own campaigns. There's already a good deal of source material available; the DVDs and videos, official references such as the scripts, *Watcher's Guides*, and *Monster Book*, and spin-off publications such as the novels and comics. All of these can be useful, but they're aimed at a popular audience and rarely look below the surface veneer of the characters.

Reading The Vampire Slayer is different; while written by authors who obviously have a real love for the series, the tone is more academic, and seems to be aimed at university media studies courses. Nevertheless it's readable, often funny, and packed with insights into the characters and their motivations. It covers *Buffy* seasons 1 to 5 and *Angel* seasons 1 and 2; a second edition adding the next two seasons should appear at the end of 2003.

Before going on I should declare a bias; I know Roz Kaveney, have written for her fiction anthologies, and am one of a group of friends who spent way too much time talking about the shows while she was putting this book together. She doesn't need my help to sell it -- it's already doing extremely well -- but bear this in mind.

The book opens with a brief introduction and five-page list of the main groupings of characters in the series (the Summers family, Sunnydale High, the Scooby Gang, the Watchers Council, and so forth, all too often ending with a line like "variously doomed others"). It's surprisingly useful; I get the feeling that college lecturers may use it to draw up neat diagrams showing the dynamics of the relationships between the different groups.

The first main chapter is an overview of the "themes and structures" of the series. Here the emphasis is on the story arc, the evolution of the long-term plot, the introduction of apparently minor characters and plot elements which turn out to be the main focus of a season, and the way in which characters have developed over the years. Anyone planning to model a campaign on the series needs to read this; it goes far beyond anything that has appeared in the *Watchers' Guides* and other commentaries.

The second brief chapter examines the Californian setting and especially its depiction in disaster movies, comparing the supernatural horrors of the series to the natural disasters and political forces that have shaped the region, and invoking film noir and other cinematic influences. It's an enjoyable read and should be useful for developing the atmosphere of a campaign.

A chapter on "vampire dialectics" compares the organizations and groupings of the series; Wolfram and Hart, The Initiative, the Scooby Gang, Angel Investigations, the Watchers, and the various groupings of vampires. The argument is political and not entirely convincing, especially when it draws on "evidence" that is ambiguous -- for example, Buffy's use of a hammer and sickle-shaped axe in one fight that happened to be incorporated into the series titles -- to claim Buffy as a socialist icon. Although outside the coverage of this edition, Willow's subsequent identification of Buffy as "the warrior of the people" in Season 6 lends weight to this argument, but there may still be other viewpoints. Nevertheless it's a good overview of this side of the series.

The next chapter covers humor, pacing, and comic timing. There are no big surprises here -- the scenes chosen for examination would be in the top ten for humor on anyone's list -- but it's an important part of these series, and ought to be important in an RPG.

I have trouble with the two chapters that follow. The first discusses the "spaces" of both series, and their symbolic importance, but seems to overlook the fact that in an action series with a limited budget any symbolic importance given to a particular type of space (such as a home) must invariably take second place to its dramatic possibilities. Trying to categorize them is probably a wasted effort. The second is a feminist discussion of Buffy and the other important female characters which delves deep into religious and symbolic theory, culminating in a discussion of the First Slayer. Here my problem is an inability to follow the argument, which is probably my own failure, not that of the author.

A second chapter on feminist issues in Buffy is much more accessible, and suggests some interesting possibilities for the development of characters; it seems a shame that the women of Angel don't receive similar attention.

The next two chapters are probably less important to gamers. The first deals with martial arts styles as depicted in East Asian cinema and Buffy, concluding that Buffy's failure to develop a distinctive style as a martial artist (largely because of the use of stunt doubles in her combat scenes) is in part a limitation of the series, but implies that the true focus of Buffy is love, not combat. This argument won't cut much ice with most gamers, who will want Slayers to have a distinctive style! The second is an overview of "slash" fiction, and won't help anyone who wants to run a canonical Buffy/Angel game.

The last main chapter is extraordinarily interesting, a discussion of identity and roleplaying within the series. Both are full of characters who aren't what they seem, sometimes to an inordinate extent; the obvious examples are Buffy-in-Faith and Faith-in-Buffy, Angel (and other vamps) passing for human, Willow pretending to be the vampire Willow and vice versa, Xander split into two different personalities, and Doyle's concealment of his demonic heritage. The way in which these roles are played will be vital in the RPG, and this section is extremely insightful.

The book ends with an episode guide, listing all of Buffy seasons 1-3 then sequential episodes of Buffy seasons 4-5 and Angel 1-2 on facing pages. The listings are deliberately brief, given the existence of so many other episode guides, four or five to a page, and very dry, concentrating on the development of the story arc; you'll learn more about individual episodes by looking at any of the Watchers' Guides or Keith Topping's excellent *Hollywood Vampire*, but as far as I know it's the only book to include such parallel episode lists.

There are two initially surprising omissions. There's no index, and the lists of episodes don't include page references for the rest of the text. I queried this, and was told that it was felt that the overwhelming presence of Buffy and Angel on so many pages, the sheer number of references to many episodes, and the abstruse nature of many of the concepts covered, would make detailed indexing counterproductive and add considerably to the size and price.

The tone of this book may not be to every reader's taste, but I feel that it's accessible enough to be an important alternative to the "official" sources for the series and the RPG supplements that will appear. It's a little expensive, and there is currently no reason to believe that a mass-market edition will appear, but I think it's worth it.

--*Marcus L. Rowland*

Punchy Music, Snoozing Players

"No matter how much the movie insists that there is tension, I must respectfully disagree with it."
--Crow T. Robot, *Mystery Science Theater 3000*: "Blood Waters of Dr. Z"

In a certain existential way, I am unable to prove that the movie *Swordfish* exists. I haven't seen it, either directly or through random snippets of cable-flipping, so for all I know it could just be a huge media hoax . . . like Piltown man or the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

At best, through empirical evidence, I can prove that DVD cases purporting to contain a transfer of *Swordfish* exist . . . and I think I remember some commercials with a bus dangling on a chain over a city (although I may be misremembering the action-packed trailer to *Howards End*).

Nevertheless, I feel obliged to reveal that I am about to reveal an aspect of the ending of the film . . . despite, again, not fully believing said movie exists.

Anyway, *Swordfish* suffers from a problem seen in many other movies, television shows, books, comics, and other media I'm sure I'm sure I'm forgetting. In *Swordfish*, the protagonist - a Hollywood version of an über-computer hacking-type guy (played by . . . oh, heck, I don't know; it's not that *Welcome Back, Kotter* guy, I know that much) does lots of heroic day-saving type stuff by sitting at the computer, typing, and doing general movie-hacker-type stuff. Now the thing is . . . no matter how close you zoom in on that sweaty furled brow, no matter how tight and crisp your dialogue is, no matter how rockin' that soundtrack is, sitting at a desk and typing on a keyboard just isn't *exciting*.

Many science fiction monster-type movies of the 50s and early 60s had the same problem, where the crux of the plot revolves around the hero scientists figuring something out; this is often accomplished through fade-wipe scenes of scientists thinking, writing formulas on chalkboards, and looking through test tubes, usually interspersed with scenes of how the Radioactive Duck-Billed Gammapus continues to slaughter innocents. Again, writing on a chalkboard generally isn't thrilling.

Which brings us to the point of this week's article. Now, this *isn't* about how to making sure the climactic bits of your stories are exciting (since, for the most part, I think this is pretty straightforward . . . though if my mailbox overfloweth from people clamoring for me to write about this, who am I to deny the masses?). Rather, when creating a new character, make sure your hero is exciting.

Now, by "exciting" I don't mean "sliding down wedding tables with two guns a-blazin' as a flock of doves flies behind." Rather, make sure your character is the kind who will do exciting things (or at least do things as exciting as the campaign requires).

For some characters this is pretty easy. If you're an enforcer for the Black Hand or a jet-setting millionaire playboy, it's pretty easy to come up with reasons for you to be someplace interesting, doing something exciting.

But for many concepts - especially those that revolve around sedentary, intellectual, or meditative pursuits -- making it "exciting" is more difficult. Does that mean if you're a lab-dwelling scientist, for example, then you aren't going to save the world? Not at all . . . but you probably won't be doing it in an exciting way. Dr. Salk, for example, saved hundreds of thousands of people from the crippling effects of polio by developing a vaccine. This is wonderful, but a similar discovery would be difficult to wrap a roleplaying game session around (again, in the same way that having the heroes sit down and [figure out the clues](#) can be a challenging climax to pull off).

But before we can discuss what to do to help ensure that your hero is exciting (which is next week's topic), we'll be asking what should you *not* do?

First, it's important to realize that simply being The Best There Is At What You Do doesn't necessarily mean you're exciting. Many players make the mistake of making one skill or ability very powerful; unfortunately, this doesn't work

by itself . . . even if you're the world's best cryptologist, when the camera zooms on you trying to decipher the Fourth Reich's plans for world domination, you're still just a guy scribbling notes and going "hmm" a lot. Even worse, for those abilities where the character is more skilled than the player, it can often boil down to an unsatisfying skill test.

"The fate of millions hangs in the balance; if you can't decipher the formula used for the antidote, the entire eastern seaboard will succumb to the horrific poisoning."

"<roll> I got a 10."

"Problem solved!"

Now, it's good to be skilled; just don't rely on it alone to make that game session exciting.

Likewise, make sure your character concept isn't so rigidly defined that basing more than a handful of adventures is going to be impossible. For example, a high school teacher is difficult to work into many campaigns, especially those that revolve around a lot of travel; the necessity to be at work five days a week means that the character is probably going to be fired if he ends up saving the world too many times without a hall pass. On the other hand, a substitute teacher -- admittedly a less glamorous option -- is quite easy to work into most games, as is a guest lecturer (which is a more glamorous option).

Finally, try to recognize those concepts that no amount of tweaking will make work. For example, full-time sea-going captains are difficult to wrap adventures around, because of both the distances and speed involved; it's not like your oil tanker character can take the ship out for a quick jaunt because an interesting subplot pops up. (Of course, with a bit of thought it's easy to make those concepts work; trying to wrap a campaign around a captain of a nuclear submarine is going to be difficult - especially if the rest of the party isn't part of the crew - but being the eccentric captain of a privately owned military surplus submarine is *rife* with possibilities.

Okay; so what *should* you do, then?

Well, before we talk about that next week, your assignment is to watch as much television as possible. (There *will* be a test.) Really, the best place to look for ideas to craft your hero is to watch a lot of television; most roleplaying games are much more like TV shows than movies, owing to their episodic nature. As such, while a movie can usually contrive to make an unlikely hero stumble into excitement once, having it happen continually stretches plausibility (watch the *Die Hard* trilogy for a textbook example . . . or, better yet, don't).

Just remember: Although watching television is good for exciting character ideas, creating a character who does nothing but watch television probably isn't exciting . . .

. . . no matter how dramatic the theme music is.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Stuperpowers**, p. 33.*

(*One star*) "To the world, the recruit dies under accidental or mysterious conditions. . . . After a short period of time during which the furor dies away, the new recruit reemerges as a Nag. Fortunately, the faces of explorers are not well enough known to risk recognition on subsequent Nag Ops -- they usually wore hats."

Swashbuckling in Sidebars

Additional Details for *GURPS Swashbucklers*

by Bryan Maloney

A book must be finished in finite time. This means that all kinds of Neat Stuff can come to an author far too late to make it in. Likewise, a book can only have so much space devoted to the extra detail that goes into sidebars. Fortunately, we have magazines. This article is a collection of "extra sidebars" for *GURPS Swashbucklers, 3rd edition* and six new (and notes revising a few other) combat styles. Page references below are all to *GURPS Swashbucklers*.

Only Copy the Best

Three Maneuvers available in the [errata for GURPS Japan](#) are suitable for inclusion in a European campaign. "Direct Mount" and "Fighting While Mounted" can be added to the Old School and the Italian School (Spaniards considered military swordsmanship too different from Destreza), but add Ride (Horse) to the style if a master teaches these maneuvers. "Tip Slash" can be added to La Verdadera Destreza, The Italian School, The Transitional French School, and Smallsword (French School). In Europe, this technique was called a "stromazone." Only a Cheap European sword would break easily if used in such a fashion against flesh, cloth, or soft leather armor.

Lobster on the Half-Sword

Once heavy plate armor became popular, European swordmasters taught to not bother trying to cut through it with a sword. Instead, they advocated thrusting at the weak points in the suit. These rules would only be important in a very early period Swashbucklers campaign. By 1600, only generals and kings went onto the battlefield in full plate armor.

The target areas for such thrusts are the armpits (vitals, torso, or arm), the groin (torso or groin), and other armor joints (elbow or knee -- knee requires getting behind the opponent). DR of a vulnerable area is 1/3 the armor's DR (round to nearest whole number). These areas are targeted with a thrust with a -4 penalty to hit in addition to any normal penalty associated with the target. If this is attempted using the "Counterattack" Maneuver against a swing attack (but not a thrust), the penalty is reduced to -2. The "Hit Locations" Maneuver can be used to reduce the penalty.

Likewise, some weapons were designed to actually penetrate hard armor. These weapons should be treated as *GURPS* normally treats armor-piercing damage, using a modifier of (2). Armor-piercing swords and knives do not have edges. They will do crushing damage if swung. They fell out of favor as heavy armor became less popular.

Left-Handedness

Left-handers have legendary status in Western swordsmanship. Dueling codes universally specified that a left-hander could be required to fight right-handed if his opponent were right-handed. Even old combat manuals pay oblique homage to the sinistral's reputation when they take pains to dispel students' fear of facing them. This reputed deadliness of left-handers has two components: one objective, the other subjective.

Left-handed swordsmen make attacks from unfamiliar directions. In *GURPS*, left-handedness is equivalent to a style. Characters who have Style Familiarity: Left-Handed would not suffer the unfamiliarity penalty. Left-handers are not automatically familiar with this style. A left-hander who has only faced right-handed opponents knows nothing more about facing southpaws than does anyone else.

The subjective component is a common Delusion: "Left-Handers are Innately Better at Combat." A -1 penalty to

active defenses would be a Quirk (given that left-handers aren't all too common). A -2 penalty would be worth -5 points. A -3 to active defenses against a left-hander would be worth -10 points. It is possible for a left-hander to have this delusion at any level (perhaps combined with Delusion "I am an Invincible Left-Hander"). According to a 1983 study (Annett, M. and Kilshaw, D. 1983. "Right- and left-hand skill II: estimating the parameters of the distribution of L-R differences in males and females." *British Journal of Psychology* 74: 269-283), only about 15% of the population at large is left-handed in the modern day. GMs who have sinistral swordsmen behind every bush should increase the value of this Disadvantage.

Left-handedness is also a Social Stigma in the Swashbuckling era. Among the upper classes (Status 1+) and common townfolk, it gives a -1 reaction that transforms to a +1 reaction in potential combat situations given their "fearsome" reputation in a fight. What of the "superstitious" peasantry? Oddly enough, anatomical analysis of medieval peasant remains (Steele, J. and Mays, S. 1995 "Handedness and directional asymmetry in the long bones of the human upper limb." *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 5:39-49) reveals that among the lower classes left-handedness was as common as it is in the modern day.

In balance, this would make Left-Handedness a 5-point Unusual Background. This presumes that the GM gives Style Familiarity: Left-Handers to no more than about 10% of his combat-skilled NPCs (even the great London Salle of Angelo often couldn't find a skilled southpaw for students to practice against). If the GM hands out the Style Familiarity willy-nilly, then Left-Handedness should be a Quirk.

Feeling Feint?

As redefined in Swashbucklers, the "Feint" is would be more accurately called "Preparation" ("Feint" sounds more spiffy). Preparations, (feints, beats, engagements, glissades, and so on) are under-emphasized in *GURPS* combat. This is because the Feint is a full combat action in *GURPS* and takes the place of a normal attack. In reality, Preparations (including many feints) are very often part of an attack that falls far short of what a *GURPS* All-Out Attack can do.

To reflect this, "Feints" no longer take up an entire action and can be immediately followed by a normal Attack in the same Turn. However, if the defender chooses to Counterattack or Riposte and the Feint attempt fails, he gets a bonus to his Active Defense and to his Counterattack or Riposte equal to the amount by which a Feint contest fails (double Counterattack/Riposte bonus if the Feinter's roll also exceeds his modified Feint score) -- a failed feint can end a fight! If the attacker instead opts to attack on the next turn or make it an All-Out Attack, the penalty is not assessed, although the attacker suffers normal consequences of an All-Out Attack. The specific Feint option must be declared before the Feint is attempted.

Example: Lord Percy has found himself in a duel against Sir Harry Hotspur. He knows that a straight attack couldn't penetrate Sir Harry's defense, so he decides to Feint and immediately follow with an attack. Lord Percy has a Feint of 14 and is using a Slashing Rapier (WM 0), so his roll is a 14. Sir Harry has a Fencing (Rapier) skill of 14 and is using a Transitional Rapier (WM 1), so his effective skill to resist the Feint is 15. Lord Percy's player rolls a 15 and Sir Harry's rolls a 13, so Lord Percy fails by two. However, Lord Percy still has to go through with his attack. Sir Harry Parries, Ripostes, and gains a +2 to his Parry and +4 to his Riposte. Had Lord Percy instead Feinted and Attacked the next turn, Sir Harry would not have gotten the Riposte bonus even though the Feint failed. Had Lord Percy rolled a 14, Sir Harry's Riposte bonus would have been only +1.

Two-Handed Sword Antics

The two-handed sword was an amazingly adaptable weapon, and weapon-masters realized that practitioners would often have to deal with people who decided to get in very close. Furthermore, heavy armor meant that thrusts with the became very important. The following maneuvers (both of which can be added to in The Old School) handle this.

Schwertringeln (Hard)

Defaults to Polearm, Short Staff, Two-Handed Sword, Spear, or Staff-4, cannot exceed lower of

Default skill or Prerequisite unarmed combat skill.

Prerequisite: Wrestling or Judo at 12 or better

This Maneuver requires the use of a weapon that can be firmly gripped with at least a shoulder's width between the wielder's hands. It is a Close Combat Maneuver and suffers no specific penalties from Close Combat. A character in Close Combat may use Schwertringeln as if it were Wrestling or Judo for an attempt to Grapple the neck or body and to Choke if the neck has been Grappled. Likewise, a character may Throw an opponent who has been Grappled with Schwertringeln. A Two-Handed Sword used in this fashion can be used to cut after a Grapple has been imposed, doing thr-1 cutting damage. Switching to a Schwertringeln from a normal grip takes effectively no time, but switching back to a normal grip takes 1 turn.

Halbschwerd (Average)

Defaults to Two-Handed Sword-2, cannot exceed skill

This Maneuver consists of grabbing the sword by the handle and about the middle of the blade. It allows finer control of thrusts with a two-handed sword and permits a wielder to thrust at both Range 1 and 2 with no penalty. It takes effectively no time to switch to a Halbschwerd from a normal grip or vice-versa.

The Fencing Parry Expanded Even More

A little tedious mathematical modeling has revealed that the Improved Parry Maneuver (sidebar p. 20) is not unbalancing on a "total point cost vs. combat efficiency" basis until it gets above Default+8. This gives us more room for spotlighting the different emphases on defense that various schools had.

Set the maximum level of the Improved Parry maneuver (sidebar p 20) to Default+4 for the Italian School (including Italian Fencing from Martial Arts for any campaign set before ca. 1640), Default+6 for La Verdadera Destreza, and Default+8 for the Transitional School and French Smallsword (Including French Fencing and Italian Fencing from Martial Arts after ca. 1640). Permit any other style and weapon to have Parry as a Hard maneuver with a maximum Default+2 level.

You can also remove the limit that the Parry Maneuver only works if the character is Lightly encumbered. Instead, apply twice the character's Encumbrance level as a penalty to the Maneuver (or apply the Encumbrance level as a penalty to Parry). If using this rule, consider permitting "lower-limit Parry" styles to take the Maneuver up to Default+8 but only permit the "extra" levels to offset Encumbrance penalties. This has not caused imbalance in my games.

Esquive on Horse

European and American cavalymen were taught to maneuver their bodies and their mounts in a way that was essentially a Mounted Esquive. This is a Hard Maneuver, defaulting to Riding-6 and unable to be improved beyond the lower of Riding and Broadsword or Lance. If the roll succeeds, it grants a defensive bonuses similar to the Esquive except that an outright Retreat is not aided. Failing the Maneuver roll requires that the defender roll vs. Riding or fall off the horse. The worse of mount's or rider's Encumbrance subtracts from the roll.

Short and Tall

A combatant's height can determine whether a weapon is effectively "longer" or "shorter." Every foot of difference in height roughly translates to a 6-inch difference in effective weapon "length" (see sidebar p. 22) due to greater arm length. Furthermore, a character suffers a bonus or penalty to his Step, Lunge, and Pass distance of 3/4 of difference between the character's height and "average" human height. This would be likely to make a difference in a fantasy campaign that pits Halfling corsairs (who would have a 1/2 yard lunge) against Ogre palace guards (who could lunge a

yard and a half!).

Stealing a March

It is possible to execute the Lunge and the Pass in such a way as the single maneuver covers the equivalent of two steps in the same amount of time as for a normal Lunge or Pass. In French a Lunge done in this manner is "en marchant" or "on the march." A Pass done in this manner is "doublet" (doubled). Both are hazardous, as they require a quick change of tempo and delicate footwork. The character rolls a quick contest of Lunge-2 or Pass-2 vs. the target's Body Language or weapon skill and covers distance equal to that of a Lunge or Pass plus that of a Step. The character must then roll vs. Lunge or Pass as normal to execute the attack. A character who successfully Steals a March is considered to have begun his attack in proper distance. Failure means that the character suffers the effect of having failed to "Close the Gap" (sidebar p. 23).

Stealing a March can also negate the effects of having a shorter weapon (or simply being shorter -- see "Short and Tall" above). The character must succeed in a quick contest between his Lunge or Pass skill and his enemy's Body Language or appropriate weapon skill.

Distance is Life

In a real fight, standing within striking distance is tantamount to suicide. The Lunge and Pass maneuvers were developed so combatants could safely close distance in order to attack. That the force of the move added impetus to the damage is merely a welcome bonus. Characters who begin their turn within their enemy's weapon Reach suffer a -1 to active defense against an Attack and a -2 to active defense against a Counterattack or a Riposte.

Characters who begin their turn outside of their enemy's weapon Reach but within Lunge/Pass distance suffer no penalties and gain no bonuses.

Characters who begin their turn outside of their enemy's Lunge/Pass distance gain a +1 to all active defenses against that enemy's attack in melee that turn. This bonus is negated if the enemy attacks on a Lunge or Pass (instead of using a Step and Attack). Those who are two or more times this distance from their enemy gain a +2. This bonus is negated if their enemy attacks on a Lunge en marchant or Pass doublet (instead of using a Step and Lunge or Step and Pass).

Using all the Options

Gamemasters who want to use all the optional rules might want to use the following Style alterations:

The Old School: Add Direct Mount, Fighting While Mounted, Mounted Esquive, Schwertwringeln, and Halbschwerd. Make Riding (Horse) a Primary skill. Permit Parry maneuver to Default+2 maximum for all weapons in style.

The Italian School: Add Direct Mount, Fighting While Mounted, and Mounted Esquive. Make Riding (Horse) an Optional skill. Replace Fencing (Rapier) with Broadsword (Rapier). Permit the character to replace the Broadsword skill with one point in the Broadsword Maneuver (defaulting from Rapier). Before 1630 require one point in the Parry Maneuver. Between 1630-1720 require two points in the Parry Maneuver and reduce the Esquive requirement to one point. After 1720 require two points in the Parry maneuver, reduce the Esquive requirement to one point, require two points in Riposte, and set the Parry maneuver maximum to Default +4.

La Verdadera Destreza: Replace Fencing (Rapier) with Broadsword (Rapier). Require two points in the Parry Maneuver and set maximum to Default +6.

Transitional School: Replace Fencing (Rapier) with the Broadsword (Rapier) skill. Permit the character to replace the Broadsword skill with one point in the Broadsword Maneuver (defaulting from Rapier). Take two points in the Parry maneuver for Broadsword (Rapier), one point for Broadsword. Set maximum for Parry Maneuver to Default +8.

French Smallsword: Require three points in the Parry maneuver and set maximum to Default +7.

French Fencing: Require three points in the Parry maneuver and set maximum to Default +7.

Italian Fencing: Replace references to Fencing (Rapier) and Fencing with Broadsword (Rapier), adjust Parry and Riposte as for The Italian School.

New Styles

Pugilism

While Professional Boxing in Martial Arts suffices for an ordinary "country pugilist," in the Swashbuckling era, "boxing" could refer to a far broader science than we know today.

Primary Skills: Boxing, Brawling, Judo (Wrestling after 1650)

Secondary Skills: Broadsword or Shortsword, Buckler

Optional Skills: Carousing, Streetwise, Savoir-Faire (lowlife)

Maneuvers: Aggressive Parry, Choke Hold, Counterattack (Boxing), Feint (Boxing), Head in Chancery, Head Lock, Jab, Pass (Boxing), Riposte (Boxing), Roundhouse Punch, Slip (Boxing), Sweeping Kick.

Cinematic Skills: Power Blow

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Dodge

Notes: Sweeping Kick defaults to Brawling-3 and does not have a Karate prerequisite. Cinematic Pugilists could have the Iron Hand Advantage.

Modern boxing gloves do not quite work as described in Martial Arts. The design of the boxing glove is mostly to protect the hands of the attacker, not the health of the target. Corbett didn't wear gloves because he was afraid of hurting Sullivan. He wore gloves because he was afraid of hurting his own hands *on* Sullivan.

This risk can be modeled by ruling that any punch that lands on something hard (like a human head or rib cage) and inflicts more than the attacker's HT/3 (plus Toughness) damage requires that the attacker roll vs. HT minus (damage inflicted) plus (Boxing/10 or Karate/10) or break his hand. Wearing modern gloves eliminates this penalty but reduces inflicted damage by 1 point. If the attacker has the Iron Hand Advantage, he can ignore this rule.

Head in Chancery (Hard)

Defaults to Judo-5, Wrestling-5 or Head Lock-1

Prerequisite: Judo or Wrestling

Cannot exceed prerequisite skill level

This type of headlock was popular among English and American pugilists. A boxer would grapple his opponent's head so that the body was behind him and then proceed to pummel him senseless. This attack is resolved as is a Head Lock. However, the hold does not permit the attacker to choke or throw his opponent. Instead, once grappled, the victim is at -1 on any attempt to Break Free. The victim cannot kick his opponent and any punches made by the victim are Wild Swings. The grappler has a +2 to punch the head, any part of the face, and the neck (which multiplies damage by 1.5) in addition to other bonuses granted by a successful grapple. (Note that "head in chancery" actually could refer to both this maneuver and a more conventional Head Lock or Choke Hold.)

Classical French Fencing

This form of fencing developed from the French school of smallsword in the early-middle 19th century and came to dominate northern Europe. By this time, gentlemen no longer wore swords on a daily basis. Likewise, while Maitres d'Armes were hired by European military academies, the swordsmanship of the battlefield had fled far from the techniques of the salle (a fact pointed out by military men like Sir Richard Burton and Col. Alfred Hutton). This was

the era when suicidal moves like the Fleche (from "fleche humaine" -- human arrow) first became popular. Dueling was the primary use of the sword, and self-defense fell by the wayside. Some exhibitions were still staged with older weapons, but this was rare.

The "epee" of this style is essentially indistinguishable from the "rapier" in the *GURPS Basic Set*; the "sabre" of this style is equivalent to that book's "sabre." The "foil" is similar to the weapon in *GURPS Basic*, but it was always constructed blunt and very flexible. Thus it does crushing damage, reduced by 2 points from the *Basic* listing.

"Foil" is not mentioned by name in the skills or maneuvers because during this era the foil was still seen as a training version of the Epee. Thus, Fencing Sport (Epee) and Fencing Art (Epee) both are practiced using the foil. The Sabre was considered a highly specialized weapon, and men could spend their lives fencing without touching one. Thus, one can have a version of this style with all sabre-related skills and Maneuvers deleted. Anyone who wished to be deemed a Maitre d'Armes would, of course, study the sabre. Proficiency in Fencing Sport (Epee) or Art (Epee) was usually a prerequisite to study the sabre.

Primary Skills: Fencing Sport (Epee) or Fencing Art (Epee), Fencing Sport (Sabre) or Fencing Art (Sabre)

Secondary Skills: Body Language, Fencing (Epee), Fencing (Sabre)

Optional Skills: Bucker Art, Broadsword Art, Broadsword (taught in the military academies), Tournament Law (varies for each salle and country), Lore of the Salle (M/E, see Modern Fencing)

Maneuvers: Corps-a-Corps (Epee), Corps-a-Corps (Sabre), Counterattack (Epee) or Stop Hit (Epee), Counterattack (Sabre) [2 points] or Stop Hit (Sabre) [2 points], Feint (Epee) [2 points], Feint (Sabre), Fleche, Floor Lunge (Epee), Floor Lunge (Sabre), Hit Location (Epee), Lunge [thrust] (Epee), Lunge [thrust] (Sabre), Lunge [cut] (Sabre), Riposte (Epee) [2 points], Riposte (Sabre)

Cinematic Skills: Jumping, Acrobatics

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Parry (Epee), Enhanced Parry (Sabre), Sentiment du Fer

Note: If using the Enhanced Parry Maneuver, maximum is Default+4 (Default+8 if using the rules in this article).

Patton's Sabre Combat

"The surest parry is a disabled opponent."

-- 2d Lieutenant George S. Patton, 1914

Patton was a skilled fencer and was an officer in the 10th Cavalry. At the beginning of the 20th century it was decided that the US Army needed to update its cavalry swordsmanship, and this task was assigned to the gifted young subaltern. When he began his manual, the First World War had yet to commence, and the limitations of cavalry on the new battlefield had yet to be demonstrated.

Patton's style was an attempt to preserve the usefulness of cavalry in an environment that already had seen rapid-firing guns like the Gatling, accurate artillery, and repeating small-arms. His premise was that cavalry's place on the battlefield was a pure shock weapon. "In a charge, the trooper is merely a projectile, the saber its point." In his theory, cavalry was to thunder across the field, taking targets by speed and force of impact.

Because of this, he concluded that only pure offense would be of any benefit. Individual casualties would simply have to be accepted so long as unit cohesion and tactical breakthrough could be achieved. Thus, he developed a style that was as pure a form of offense applied to the sword as has ever been imagined. The only defense taught was an attack with opposition, to be used at full gallop. No footwork was taught beyond the adoption of a riding stance and a the use of a lunge.

Patton's style was never implemented, and any cavalry attempting to use it on the Western Front would likely have done nothing more than repeat the Charge of the Light Brigade. It is an epitaph for the Western sword.

Primary Skills: Lance (Patton Sabre), Riding (Horse)

Secondary Skills: Savoir-Faire (Military)

Optional Skills: none

Maneuvers: Counterattack (Patton Sabre) [2 points], Direct Mount, Lunge [thrust] (Patton Sabre), Mounted Esquive, Mounted Combat.

Note: This style cannot use the Enhanced Parry maneuver.

Lance (Patton Sabre), P/A

Defaults to DX 5 or Broadsword 6

The Patton sabre is a slender, extremely stiff sword, to be used as if it were a lance. It is essentially a light broadsword (see p. 21). Since the weapon cannot be couched, it does not use the full ST of the mount to do damage. Instead, the rider's ST is used and every die of damage that the mount's ST would have done is a +1 bonus, but the wielder must make a Lance (Patton Sabre) roll to avoid losing the weapon on a successful hit. Lance (Patton Sabre) has a parry of 2/3 skill but only if the character is Counterattacking (the penalty to parry while Counterattacking still applies). At any other time, this skill gives no parry.

Modern Fencing

In 1914, representatives met in France to form an International Federation of Fencing (FIE). This body was invented to regularize the sport of fencing among different countries. In 1914, the First World War broke out. After the war had ended, dueling (which had already been disappearing) simply fell out of the minds of those gentlemen who survived. Killing someone over slights didn't seem to matter that much anymore, and the defense of personal "honor" with deadly force mostly became the property of teenage boys, organized crime, and street gangs, where it has remained to the present day.

Divorced from lethal combat, fencing evolved into a pure sport, with no need to consider the conditions of a real fight. Therefore, the penalty for using Fencing Sport in real combat would be -5 instead of the normal -3. Unfortunately, some practitioners have failed to realize the difference between a pure sport and a combat style and can suffer from the following delusions: "Modern fencing is as good as or better than historical sword skills in real combat." and/or "Modern fencing alone is sufficient basis for understanding all (Western) swordsmanship." In most modern campaigns, these would just be quirks. In a campaign that requires a character to actually defend himself with swords on a regular basis, these would be worth -10 or -15 points. Some modern fencers have Intolerance of all other styles of fencing and swordplay, and/or the Odious Personal Habit of insisting that only modern fencing is "true" fencing or even that only modern fencing can be called "fencing" at all (despite the fact that "fencing" has been used in English for the scientific use of swords for at least 450 years). Due to the rarity of other forms of fencing worldwide, these would be quirks in a modern-day campaign unless the character spends a good deal of time around people who practice other forms of fencing. It should be noted that some modern practitioners of "historical" fencing styles have corresponding mental disadvantages.

The weapons of modern fencing are extremely light and flexible. Modern fencing weapons are not available sharp and must be custom-sharpened. No reputable fencing weapon dealer or armorer would sharpen a modern fencing weapon. Start with the ***GURPS Basic*** fencing weapons and treat them as if they are "ultra-light" (sidebar, p. 21), with a minimum weight of 1 pound. Reduce thrust damage by 1 point due to blade flexibility. Reduce thrust damage by another point if not sharpened (and damage is crushing). If these weapons are made in the modern day, charge the standard price instead of increasing price for lightness. Primary skills: Any one of Fencing (Epee) Sport, Fencing (Foil) Sport, Fencing (Sabre) Sport -- yes, they are that different from each other in the modern venue.

Secondary Skills: Body Language, Jumping

Optional Skills: Fast Talk, the other two Primary Skills, Tournament Law (FIE Rules), Lore of the Salle (M/E)

Maneuvers: Close Combat (For weapons known), Corps a Corps, Feint (For weapons known), Fleche, Floor Lunge, Flunge (Sabre), Lunge, Riposte (For weapons known), Stop Hit (For weapons known).

Cinematic Skills: None

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Dodge, Enhanced Parry (For weapons known)

Notes: If using the Enhanced Parry Maneuver, maximum is Default+4 (Default+8 if using the rules in this article).

Cinematic Maneuvers are based on claims made by some more enthusiastic modern fencers.

A character who studies this style cannot take Fleche until he has put at least 1 point in Epee. The Flunge was invented after the Fleche was prohibited in Sabre. Treat it like a Fleche with the penalties of a Floor Lunge.

Lore of the Salle is a body of "history" transmitted among some sectors of the fencing community. It is essentially Victorian misunderstanding of the history of European combat. Many modern fencers know Lore of the Salle and know that it is not true.

Revised Styles (originally in Pyramid #18)

School of Saviolo

In 1595, Vincenzo Saviolo, an Italian teaching in England, published "Of the Use of the Rapier and Dagger." He soon followed with "Of Honor and Honorable Quarrels." The first was a style manual, the second a rulebook for dueling. Saviolo concentrated on the rapier and did not teach broadsword, polearm, or unarmed combat. His students were gentlemen who could afford his price (a vicar's annual wages per month!). Saviolo disliked parrying and gave defensive footwork great importance. He emphasized the thrust very heavily.

Primary Skills: Body Language, Fencing (Rapier)

Secondary Skills: Main-Gauche, Cloak, Fencing Art (Rapier)

Optional Skills: Buckler, Tournament Law (Fencing), Savoir-Faire

Maneuvers: Attack and Fly Out, Counterattack (Rapier) [2 points], Disarming (Rapier), Esquive (Rapier) [2 points], Feint (Rapier), Hit Location (Rapier), Off-Hand Weapon Training (Main-Gauche), Off-Hand Weapon Training (Rapier), Lunge [thrust] (Rapier), Riposte (Rapier), Stromazone (Rapier), Bind (Rapier), Retain Weapon (Rapier)

Cinematic Skills: Pressure Points, Jumping

Cinematic Maneuvers: Dual-Weapon Attack (Rapier), Dual-Weapon Attack (Main-Gauche), Enhanced Dodge, Flying Lunge

Notes: Cuts with the rapier are at -2 skill in this style. If using Enhanced Parry maneuver, maximum is Default+2 (Default+4 if using the rules in this article).

School of DiGrassi

DiGrassi (contrary to what I had previously reported in *Pyramid #18*) taught a style that the London Maistres of Defense likely would have approved of. The original Italian version of his manual makes it plain that his school is closer to the Old School than I had previously thought. Since he was in the mainstream of Italy, the Italian School adequately represents his teaching, but add Shield as a Primary skill and Polearm as a Secondary.

London School

The London School essentially is the Old School up until the middle 17th century, when it was supplanted by Transitional Rapier and Broadsword taught side by side.

Revived Historical Combat

Beginning in the late 20th century, interest in archaic European swordsmanship revived. Modern-day practice runs the gamut from antics that would get someone killed in a real fight to hard labor at attempting to reconstruct actual historical combat methods. Likewise, attitudes go from "This isn't real." to "We're more real than they were back then." As is to be expected, attitudes and practices don't necessarily match up. The finest practical scholar can focus on every tiny detail his re-creations fall short of the reality, and a duffer with foam toys can believe that he's perfectly recreated the skills of Sir William Marshall. Most practice and attitude fall somewhere in the middle.

Adding this to a modern-day campaign can be done by taking any historical style(s) and replacing Combat skills with appropriate Combat Art and/or Combat Sport skills. You will have to decide how "real" various groups are, and assign appropriate penalties from -3 to -8. As a rule of thumb, -3 would go to a group that uses full-weight steel swords,

historically accurate protective equipment, full-strength blows, at least some of the unarmed techniques associated with the style, and spends a great deal of time checking and re-checking their work against available manuscripts and period books. At least a few of them would be proficient in appropriate archaic languages. The -8 would go to a group that uses only padded weapons and very modern protective equipment, restricts target area greatly, prohibits unarmed techniques, and relies entirely upon making it up as one goes along (or making it up based on some modern sport).

A character can learn non-Sport/Art versions of these combat skills. He can use Character Point awards after real combat experience. Tournaments and ring time (agonistic encounters) a don't count. Only potentially lethal and fully hostile (antagonistic) combat counts. He can study under somebody who also knows the non-Sport/Art version. There are a few people currently around who could know Classical French Fencing as presented above (real duels were fought as late as the 1930s), but they're not exactly spring chickens. This does not pass through generations of trainers. Some modern practitioners have incorporated living martial arts into their training, especially for wrestling/grappling and unarmed striking. Finally, remember that non-Sport/Art versions of combat skills can default from the Sport/Art versions for learning purposes.

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Adding Depth To The Whole

Approaches To Building Interesting Characters

by Michael Anguiano

Making a player character is, at its most basic, a mechanical process that usually involves dice and number-crunching. Beyond the list of labels and statistics, it can also be a very creative process to develop a character with depth and personality. Here, then, are some tools and approaches to help that creative process. After all, the more interesting your character is for you, the more fun you have as a player and the more others will enjoy interacting with that character.

I. Scratch That Niche

The most obvious place to start is to decide on the niche you want your character to occupy in the party. Build your character's skills and abilities, come up with a cool name that has an umlaut over a random vowel and, *viola*, you're done! This is also known as the "well, duh" process.

Actually, building to fill a niche is not necessarily a restrictive approach unless the campaign setting is a very limited one. Any large city on a trade route (such as New York City, Cairo, or Melbourne) will have a large demographic variety, so any character in or from that city need not be from a majority ethnic or sociological group. Which skills would fit the niche you're filling? Find an occupation that would provide that, then look across the demographic groups that could produce this character. Keep in mind that an occupation in one group can cross over to serve a parallel function within another, or that an entirely different function might be found in the new group. In this way, you can look for the unexpected combinations from an otherwise standard list of ingredients. For example, London in 1896 might contain any of the following persons:

- Dr. Miwa, linguist, female Asian (Japanese), age 32, widowed. Second generation Australian citizen. Anglican. Hates tea.
- "Uncle Bill" Maioranos, experienced cowpoke, male Hispanic-Native American mix, age 19. Works in traveling "wild west" show. Knife scars on left side of face and neck, rolls his own cigarettes.
- Elliott Lowndes, engineer/inventor, male Caucasian, age 45, married. Runs small machine shop. Met Tesla in Chicago in '95, now believes himself to be Tesla. Left-handed.
- Capt. "Ned" Walker, balloonist, male Maori native of New Zealand, age 29, unmarried. Significant naval experience, left seafaring after developed interest in airships. Extensive tribal tattooing, refers to self in third person.

These are not obvious combinations, yet any of these characters could be useful in a campaign. Each is well within the realm of possibility because of the tremendous mix of cultures, races, backgrounds, and occupations that regularly moved through London at the turn of the last century. This sort of approach is possible with just about any major city, and most campaign worlds will contain at least one major city somewhere.

Another approach is to find an overlooked niche within the standard spectrum of culture and society. For example, a character with medical skills may not have learned them from living patients. Also remember that characters might develop the same skill profile from differing occupations and thus have radically different origins and interactions with others. Consider the differences in playing these PCs, despite parallel skill profiles:

Alexandria, 1000 BC: Celtic druid *or* Malawi shaman

Atlanta, 1850: night rider (i.e. grave robber) *or* British army doctor

Honolulu, 1940: ninja *or* stage magician & acrobat

Seattle, 2052:

ex-merc gun-for-hire *or* disgraced ex-SWAT team leader

Similarly, look for the synthesis of seeming contradictions, which can result in a perfectly reasonable character that counters expectations. A physician from an alien culture may not have a Hippocratic oath that guides their profession, so torture can be an entirely moral and ethical application of medical skills (especially since the physician could induce maximum pain while minimizing actual physical damage, thus best preserving the health of the 'patient'). A young clanless vampire might be the recent unclaimed product of an exceedingly old vampire, producing a blend of native power and general cluelessness.

To this end, reference books on history and culture are always useful to provide some key details that you can build a character around. This applies to contemporary and historical games but adapts easily to futuristic games as well. And, of course, you can always fall back on reading source books for the game itself.

II. "Tell Me About Your Childhood "

The character's personality, attitudes, temperament, demeanor, and the like, are sources of texture which theoretically come out during roleplay. The character's background is a useful seeding ground to explain these traits and can make for interesting roleplaying possibilities if the GM decides to follow up on something in your background. Reverse-engineer your character's development with the various factors and events that will produce the sort of personality that you wish to play. This sounds simple and obvious, but can get much more interesting with the proper reference books on psychology and sociology. The better you can develop and understand your character's pathology, the more depth a character has despite an otherwise routine surface. It also lets you take the character in directions that are consistent with the pathology but can surprise other players.

Still think this is staggeringly obvious, eh?

Okay, here's a simple application, courtesy of *Shadowrun*. "Cleve" is a male elf soldier, quietly competent with a stoic demeanor and a low-key hostility towards just about everyone. So far he's a pretty standard archetype, if not an outright cliché. Now, let's take a tidbit from reference material: An orphan male infant will often develop a distrust of women and a poor sense of self-worth, stemming from a subconscious perception of abandonment on the most fundamental level. There's the crux of Cleve's pathology: He was orphaned as an infant and raised entirely by a human family, thus identifying himself more as human than elf. Consequently, Cleve has a distrust of women because of the abandonment issue, alienation from humans because of their general bias against elves, and resentment of elves because it's their fault that humans don't like him.

More reference material: a lack of self-worth can present itself in keeping a social distance from others, as a way of avoiding possibly hurtful interaction. Thus, Cleve has a reason to avoid talking much to people, and by extension would tend to dislike characters who specialize in social interaction. Since he knows he's pretty strong and a good fighter, he can safely find a sense of worth in his role as a soldier. *Viola!* Cleve goes from a cardboard cut-out to having a complex emotional landscape with rich roleplaying possibilities. It also gives him an excuse to have a really cruddy attitude around that beautiful female elf socialite.

In this way, a healthy understanding of unhealthy people can produce a character with depth and texture. The caveat is that if you overdo the developmental trauma, you wind up with a character who should logically be an emotional cripple. Also remember that the same event doesn't guarantee the same reaction in all people, so you need to be sure how you want to play the spin of development from the impacting event to the characters' present personality. After all, what doesn't kill you might make you stronger, or it just might make you someone who flinches a lot and walks with a limp.

It is, of course, important to note that you don't casually bandy about something that is genuinely difficult for another player to tolerate, especially if it's going to be a central element of your character's motivations. This is supposed to be fun, so creating a painful environment for another player is a very bad thing.

III. Friends, Romans, and Countrymen

As the saying goes, you are who you know. Friends, family, associates, rivals, enemies, neighbors, pets; these are all extra details that can add texture to the character, even if only in your own mind, because it gives the character more life than just a list of stats. All of these details are grist for the mill of your PC's mental landscape as well as for the GM's storytelling. Does the character have siblings, children, living parents? A cat, dog, or alien robot goldfish? Is the PC on good terms with former employers and why not? Did the character ever throw oatmeal at the queen? Inquiring GMs want to know!

A principle to remember is that an outsider tends to be defined by role, an insider tends to be defined by history. If the PC is a physical or social outsider, then you can develop your character's background separately from the current game setting. If he is a member of the local community, then the character's background can directly affect daily interactions. Either way, if these background associations are nifty enough, then your GM might draw them into the main action of the story. Again, this might seem obvious, but it can be as simple as the neighbor dropping by for coffee just as a mad whack voodoo ninja is about to garrote your PC, or it can also be as complex as the team's mission to defend the homeworld of your PC's mercenary cult against a massive Imperial invasion to crush non-aligned military forces before the Empire moves against Resistance forces directly.

Background associations can also be an overarching "springboard" strategy that lets a new character plug into a preexisting set of details, even if the association is from an otherwise unconnected game. Again, the more details and depth to a PC's background, the more threads that a GM might weave into later stories. An employer organization can unite characters of similar background or occupations across an assortment of settings. An extended family can connect PCs across games with overlapping time frames, while successive generations of the family can connect PCs through history.

Example: the Landis family, which starts with Dixie (*Cyberpunk*), aka Dorothea Landis, a professional driver with military training and a family back in Georgia. Later, a PC named Homer was created for an unconnected game (*Underground*) as a gun-toting heavy, ex-cop, and by default became the PC group's driver. Since the two games had parallel time frames, the decision was made to connect Homer and Dixie as siblings, and suddenly the Landis family took on a life of its own, with assorted traditions and familial expectations. Any near-future dystopian game can feature a Landis sibling or cousin, which currently include Cleve (*Shadowrun*) and Rose (*Car Wars*). Similarly, any historical game can have a Landis ancestor and any futuristic game can feature a Landis descendant. If the PC is a combat driver, then he/she is true to the Landis genes. If not, well, then the PC is the black sheep of the family.

IV. Miscellaneous Oddities and Endings

The Damaged Hero is a useful archetype, in which an otherwise outstanding character is physically or emotionally damaged and consequently unwilling or unable to take the role that society might be expected to offer. If your hero is one of the foremost experts on particle physics, you need to explain why he is crawling around abandoned mines in the Belgian Congo, instead of working on the Manhattan Project. Maybe he could never have a professional career because of emotional issues, such as hostility to authority or a sense of worthlessness among professional peers. Perhaps he believes an atomic bomb to be inherently immoral; has German family and is considered a security risk; or simply lacks credibility due to some personal trait (gender, mental health, religious affiliation, mail-order diploma). This gives the PC a reason for the current situation and also a personal obstacle to struggle against.

Parallel to this is the character who defines himself solely in terms of their occupation. For characters like the soldier in the field or the man in black, the lack of a personal life is an occupational side effect and the character still has some degree of personal history. Others, like angels, animate golems, and androids, will typically have no personal history apart from their occupation. These characters are more challenging to develop with depth, since the character's personality is expressed almost entirely in their professional demeanor. Determine the character's philosophical approach to their work. Is the character a cowboy or by-the-book? Tolerant of others' professional shortcomings? Enthusiastic, utilitarian, or burned out? A showboat, a team player, or a spearcarrier? Reads Dilbert or Dear Abby?

"What If?" can also be a useful (if somewhat random) approach, in creating an odd conjunction and figuring out what circumstances would produce that conjunction. What if an undead character had living children? What if an angel had amnesia? What if an alien imposter did not know it was an imposter? What if a suicidal man discovered he was immortal? What if Jerry Lewis movies were funny?

Last but not least, the character's name and dress are part of how the character presents to others and consequently can be used to either emphasize or counter standard presumptions. When something valuable goes missing, the police might be just a tad more suspicious of the guy dressed entirely in black who calls himself "Stealth." Imperial authorities will look more closely at the permits for Capt. Nova Charlemagne of the free trader Flaming Blade Of Liberty, while Otis is more likely to get chased by outer rim pirates when piloting the freighter Acme Cargo Company. Of course, players shouldn't be surprised by these sort of expectations if their characters have presented nothing else for the rest of the universe to see. Just because your character has a world of depth to you doesn't mean anyone else has had a chance to see it yet.

In the end, though, you should beware of overplaying your hand in the developmental stage by simply producing an exhaustive or incongruous list of details. The character still has to fit into the campaign setting, after all. To wit:

"Hmmm. Well, you certainly have quite an impressive resume. Distinguished family, ties to royalty, Oxford education, exemplary career in the British military including command of an SAS unit, several years as an elite operative of MI-6 as liaison to international counterterrorism strike teams. I see that you have three degrees, including law, and you've done groundbreaking graduate work in genetics and nanotechnology. Fluent in nine languages, including two that are unwritten, one studied only by Talmudic scholars, and American sign language. Your list of references require high-level security clearance. And you've been knighted, I see, congratulations on that. I must say, you have much better qualifications than we usually see in an application here at Mall Security."

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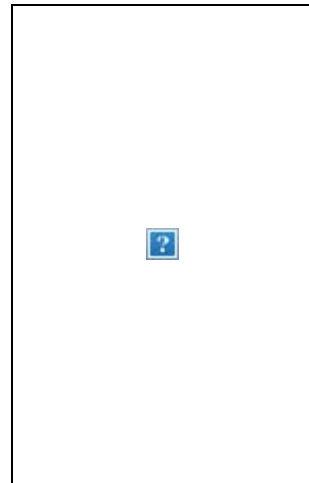
Hamlet! A Game In 5 Acts

Published by [Interactivities Ink, Ltd.](#)

Designed by Mike Young

Cover Art and Assembly by Laura Overman

b&w card components in envelope; \$6.50



Some question whether William Shakespeare did -- indeed, could have -- written all those plays, attributing it to Bacon or someone else. Anyone who had to sit through endless iterations of his works in high school won't be inclined to look favorably upon them. Everyone complains they can't get into Shakespeare's head; maybe that's why Interactivities Ink, Ltd. made *Hamlet! A Game in 5 Acts*. Now you're in Shakespeare's head, literally. You're a voice (3 to 8 voices can play), born to set it right, trying to guide the Bard to write the ending you want for one of his most famous plays.

The method to the madness: A player is chosen to be First Player (the position of First Player rotates one person to the left each round). He takes all the actions allotted to him for his turn (called a Scene), performs some "free-action" bookkeeping, and passes the play to the left. When everyone's had a turn, that's called an Act. If you have victory conditions at the end of an Act, you win; otherwise play continues to the next Act. If no one has met his conditions by the end of Act 5, the game ends in a draw.

Each player gets one of 14 ending cards. These indicate a status for some or all of the Dramatis Personages (DPs) in the game. The play. Whatever. This is the condition you want those characters in -- if they're in that condition at the end of an Act, you've met your victory conditions. For example, the "I, Claudius" ending requires that Claudius be alive; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern be loyal to him; and Polonius, Gertrude, and Laertes all be dead.

The nine DPs are represented by large cards (eight of them -- Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are inseparable) with a series of conditions (is Hamlet in England? France? Denmark?), sliding scales (how sane is Ophelia?), and/or actions ("Hamlet equivocates") printed on them. To get to your ending you'll have to manipulate these events in order; you must provide 11 tokens or pennies to keep track.

The bulk of the DP cards are rows and columns listing actions. The first column tells you how often the action may be performed; the second gives you the action's name; the third is the requirement(s) that must be met before that action can be taken; and the last column lists the results. So if you have the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Alive and Well and Living in England ending, eventually you'll need Hamlet in England. If you wanted to exile him there (that's one way to be rid of him, anyway), it requires Hamlet: In Denmark (otherwise where would he be exiled from?) and Claudius: Suspects Hamlet. If you meet the requirements and send the Dane packing, Hamlet is moved to England, poor Ophelia's Sanity goes down 1 on the sliding scale, the Action box is checked (you can't very well exile him to England when he's already there), and Hamlet's Exiled to England box is checked.

Where do all these actions come from? You get a set number each Scene depending on the number of players and which Act you're in. As the game progresses, you get more actions to simulate those riveting, runaway Shakespearian climaxes. You must use as many actions as possible, usually on different activities (Ophelia can only go mad so fast). Everyone's going to struggle to get their ending, of course, so characters may switch sides, alter loyalties, and change locations several times a game.

What if someone you need alive for your ending dies before you can achieve your goals? Then you must use the

special Everyone Wins, Everyone Loses ending. Three guesses as to what that ending entails, and the first two don't count.

Hamlet! can be a dizzying game. There are a lot of actions available, and figuring out which ones shape your ends can be a strain. There are more things in heaven and earth, and they're all packed into the DP cards in tiny print. It helps to know the play, and to look at it from that viewpoint up until game play diverges from canon (like when Hamlet and Ophelia elope). It's not much fun trying to find the action you want, especially since you'll probably have to backtrack to the condition that gives you the condition you need to get your victory condition. Help is available in the *Hamlet!* strategy guide, but why this indispensable item is a .pdf download [at the website](#) and not included in the game is a mystery. Interfering with another player's strategy is almost impossible -- you'll be lucky to remember what you're doing from one Scene to the next, never mind guessing which endings everyone else has.

The large cards are on good, firm stock, though they expect you to keep track of certain information with light pencil marks. Eventually that between-games erasing is going to take its toll on your stuff (which may be a reason to make photocopies). The ending cards are about what you'd expect from a game that comes in the now-familiar envelope storage system pioneered by Cheapass Games, and there are four truly spiffy "Spying on Hamlet" glass-gem markers packaged with the game. You must also provide one six-sided die.

To buy or not to buy? Slings and arrows aside, the play's the thing, and the more you play the more accustomed you become to the Personage layouts. Fouling up your enemies' plans deliberately isn't critical as you're almost guaranteed to do so unintentionally (these people travel between England and Denmark like migratory birds), and just getting your own story straight will set the table on a roar. The game is one of infinite jest, a deft combination of guerilla erudition and wry humor, and no matter how confusing and head-spinning the action becomes, *Hamlet! A Game in 5 Acts* is a piece of work that will make more sense than anything Shakespeare ever penned. A hit, a palpable hit.

--Andy Vetromile

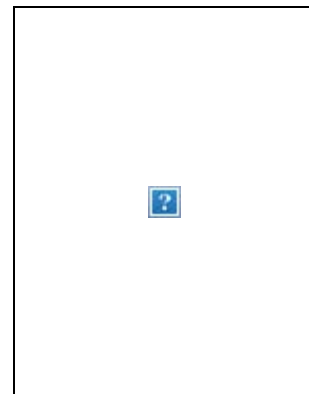
Pyramid Review

Armada X

Published by [ThreeSixty Publishing](#)

Written, Designed and Produced by Mark Bruno

Price: \$3



[Deep7](#) has carved a niche for itself with the 1pg series of mini-RPGs. Each is designed to cover a particular genre using just a single page of rules, another page of advice for the GM on running said genre, and a number of scenarios, all of which come as a PDF Adobe Acrobat file. Now a second company, ThreeSixty Publishing, has entered the fray with something not that dissimilar. This is the OneShot Mini-Adventure Pack, which is designed to give a single evening's worth of gaming as a break from the group's extended campaign. To fit this concept, everything in a OneShot pack is intended to be fast, including character generation, rules and mechanics, and game play. Backing this up is a set of pregenerated characters, a campaign setting, and a set of scenarios.

The first OneShot Mini-Adventure Pack is *Armada X*, a science fiction setting that takes place in the not-too-distant future. It comes as a 20-page 824 kb PDF document that is quick to download and store. The layout is tidy, with an easy-to-read text style. Although some color is used for the layout, it can be printed out in black and white without loss of detail. The only illustration given is that of a star map, but *Armada X* does not suffer from this lack of art and it does keep the document size down.

Character creation for a OneShot game should take no more than ten minutes, and can probably be done in half that time. Characters are defined by three attributes -- Body, Mind, and Soul. Skills fall under one of the three attributes -- physical skills under Body, intellectual skills under Mind, and intuitive or innate skills (Perception, Charisma, Direction Sense, Psionics and so on) under Soul. 42 points are spent on both attributes and skills, with an average human score for either being five and the starting maximum being six. Characters can also have one or two backgrounds, such as Android (adds bonuses to Body and Mind, but reduces Soul), Wealth, Starship Owner, Iron Will, Cosmic Beauty, Human Computer, Marksman, and Psionics. This is the only way of gaining Psionics, which work exactly like skills. For those wanting to cut to the chase, the six pregenerated characters are Spacer, Merchant, Soldier, Scout, Psionacist, and Engineer.

The OneShot mechanics are an equally simple percentile system. Whenever a character undertakes an action using a skill, they create a base percentage from the value of the skill and its core attribute. The attribute provides the tens score and the skill its units value. Thus if a character with a Mind of 6 and Astronavigation skill of 4, they have a Base Percentage in Astronavigation of 64%. Rolling under this Base Percentage gives a simple success, under both the tens and units value gives a good success, while a straight roll of 01% is a critical success. Attribute tests are made against the appropriate attribute multiplied by ten. The outcome of opposed tests are determined by the best success roll made and feature heavily in combat, where better success rolls result in more damage inflicted. Overall, the mechanics are simple and fast, though they could have benefited from an example or two.

Armada X is set in the 23rd Century after a fourth World War has led to the formation of the New World Authority, and the invention of the Stellar Drive has led to the establishment of hundreds of colonies throughout the Milky Way. The Core Worlds lie in the Sagittarius Arm, the Mid-Worlds in the Perseus and Orion Arms, and the Outer Colonies in the Cygnus Arm. As mankind has spread, tensions have grown between the Core Worlds and the Outer Colonies, as social customs, politics, religious beliefs and economic interests begin to diverge. Relations grew worse after the NWA attempted to enforce taxes first on foodstuffs and then communication, with the "Digital Communiqué Act" hitting the Outer Colonies' lawyers, merchants, and digital news services hard. Despite protests about the violation of their civil

rights, the NWA sent in troops to enforce the taxes and maintain order. Open rebellion broke out under the aegis of the Colonial Congress after Terran troops gunned down a rebel cell.

A state of war now exists in 2268 between the Colonial Armed Forces and the Terran Armadas assigned to suppress the insurrection. The colonists look to an earlier revolution for inspiration -- that of the American colonies against the British Crown some five centuries earlier. The author does as well, naming the 13 original colonial sectors for the original 13 colonies in North America -- Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode, Connecticut, York, Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Carolina Major, Carolina Minor, and Georgia. Currently Rhode, Virginia, and Jersey have been occupied by Terran Armadas.

Unfortunately, the two scenarios included with *Armada X* do not make use of this inspiration beyond the naming conventions. The first, "Blockade Runners," has the players attempting to deliver supplies to a besieged planet in the Jersey Sector, which will ensure the continued survival of the rebel forces until relief arrives. The second has them helping evacuating a planet being invaded by Terran forces when they are betrayed and sent off-course in their shuttle. In and of themselves, both are decent enough adventures that should each provide an evening or two's worth of gaming, but really they come across as space opera that takes place "A long time ago in a galaxy far away . . ." rather than in the *Armada X* setting. Worse still, much of the background is painted in black and white, and what would have been the equivalent of the British -- the Terran Armadas -- are left devoid of personality and receive extremely poor press.

This first OneShot Mini-Adventure Pack shows much promise for future releases, as the system is fast, easy, and slick, with a character generation method that takes no time at all. These factors, combined with its inexpensive price, provide *Armada X* with its best selling points; unfortunately, the example scenarios do not live up to this potential. What should have been its tag to get players interested -- a fast SF RPG that is set against a rebellion that draws upon the American Revolution for its inspiration -- is never fully tapped. Should ThreeSixty Publishing make more of the setting in future OneShot Mini-Adventure Packs, they might be worth checking out at that time.

--*Matthew Pook*

A Little Bird Told Me: The Language of the Birds

"Finally," said Ingolf, 'cut my arm and lick some of the blood.'

'I'd rather not,' said Malcolm, firmly.

'If you do, you'll be able to understand the language of the birds.'

'I don't particularly want to be able to understand the language of the birds,' said Malcolm."

-- Tom Holt, *Expecting Someone Taller*

As we learn more of the mystical grammar involved, we may come to agree with Malcolm's instinctive assessment. Or perhaps not. But before we can understand the Language of the Birds, we may have to puzzle out the language of the people who claim to understand the language of the birds. Avaunt!

*"Finally I would add that **argot** (cant) is one of the forms derived from **The Language of the Birds**, parent and doyen of all other languages -- the one spoken by philosophers and **diplomats**. It was knowledge of this language which Jesus revealed to his Apostles, by sending them his spirit, the Holy Ghost. This is the language which teaches the mystery of things and unveils the most hidden truths."*

-- "Fulcanelli," *The Mystery of the Cathedrals*

The enigmatic alchemist Fulcanelli (who may or may not have been the artist Jean-Julien Champagne, and may or may not have died in 1932) begins his alchemical-architectural analysis of Gothic cathedrals by invoking the "phonetic Cabala" of punning allusions and hints that he finds throughout these stone palimpsests. He derives "Gothic" from "goetic" (meaning demonological or necromantic), and explains that the *art gothique*, or *argotique* for short, is the same as the *argot* or cant of the criminal, vagrant, or troubadour, and claims that it is the secret language Rabelais called the Dive-Bouteille or "holy bottle." He further derives both words from the *Argo*, the ship of Jason, implying that secret language serves as the vessel to carry the scholar to the goal of illumination. (In a fine Gallic aside, Fulcanelli notes that "People think that such things are merely a play on words. I agree." *C'est irrefutable*.) And for some odd reason, Fulcanelli names his notional occult pun-code the Language of the Birds.

Despite Fulcanelli's (and his disciples') claims for antiquity, the specific term "language of the birds" in this occult sense only goes back another fifty or so years. (It's not found, for example, anywhere in the major alchemical texts.) Fulcanelli probably lifted it from the writings of the magnificently-named occultist, antiquarian, and sometime archaeologist Claude-Sosthenes Grasset d'Orcet, who in the 1880s proposed similar "coded" rebus-interpretations of illuminated manuscripts and Renaissance paintings. Where *he* got the term, we may never know, since he never cited sources in his journal articles. (Notwithstanding, later art historians have discovered, to their surprise, that some of Grasset d'Orcet's interpretations are potentially valid -- even for paintings he would never have seen.) Nothing loth, Fulcanelli also termed it the [Green](#) Language, which is how his latter-day epigone David Ovason uses it in *The Secrets of Nostradamus Revealed*. Ovason uses the Green Language to find that [Nostradamus](#) used the Language of the Birds in his prophecies. When Nostradamus referred to his obfuscations as *scabreux* ("scabrous"), he was secretly hiding the archaic word *cabré* ("rearing upward") inside it, hinting that his "scabrous" obfuscations hide words ascending toward the skies -- toward, in other words, the realm of the birds.

"Therewith Sigurd cut out the heart of the worm with the sword called Ridil; but Regin drank of Fafnir's blood, and spake, "Grant me a boon, and do a thing little for thee to do. Bear the heart to the fire, and roast it, and give me thereof to eat."

Then Sigurd went his ways and roasted it on a rod; and when the blood bubbled out he laid his finger thereon to essay it, if it were fully done; and then he set his finger in his mouth, and lo, when the heart-blood of the worm touched his tongue, straightway he knew the voice of all fowls, and heard withal how the wood-peckers chattered in the brake beside him."

-- William Morris (trans.), *Volsungasaga*

And intriguingly enough, the notion of the language of the birds and prophetic wisdom do connect up deep in the mists of antiquity. Sigurd gains knowledge and wisdom by learning the language of the birds, as does an anonymous merchant in the *Arabian Nights*. Chaucer's "The Squire's Tale" and the Arabian "Tale of Taj al-Muluk and the Princess

Dunya" both refer to a magic ring that gives the wearer the power to understand the language of birds, with positive consequences. Apollonius of Tyana, the greatest magician of the Roman era, was reputed to gain his learning from listening to birds speak, as did the Irish prophet Saint Columcille (who like Sigurd slew, or at least rebuked, a dragon - the Loch Ness Monster). Siberian shamans wear bird costumes, and communicate with their totems, says Joseph Campbell, "in a strange, squeaky voice" -- the language of the birds? (And is it similar to the high, squeaky voices used by those possessed by some loa in Voudun ceremonies?) The Greek seer Tiresias knew the languages of both birds and snakes, as did Orpheus, and the healer and seer Melampus. And, no doubt to the delight of Fulcanelli, the Argonaut Mopsus was recruited solely for his knowledge of the Language of Birds, which he learned from Apollo. Mopsus battled the [Amazons](#), and eventually died of snakebite (there's that opposition again) in Libya, where his temple served as an infallible oracle long after his death.

Some of these mythical figures eventually become (or begin as) birds. The litany includes not only the swan-mays of north European folklore, but the sorceress Circe (whose name means "falcon" in Greek), the Theban [Sphinx](#), the puissant [griffin](#), and (surprise) Sigurd again, who not only marries Brunhild, an avian Valkyrie, but is the son (in Danish legend) of the crow-goddess Krake. Fellow dragon-battler Saint Columcille, meanwhile, somehow received Columba, the Latin word for "dove," as his cognomen. As birds fly between earth and heaven, these and many other figures change from human to avian and back with eerie unpredictability. Another intriguingly transitional avian figure is the ibis-god Thoth. Thoth, of course, invented all languages, especially the magical one in which all things received their True Names. Being half-bird himself, perhaps the ur-language of Thoth is also the Language of the Birds, which would account for its magical power and puissance.

*"One day the birds of the world,
those we know and those that
nobody knows, all gathered
together for a great conference."
-- Farideddin Attar, *The Conference of the Birds**

And if the Language of the Birds is so all-powerful, the birds themselves must have a certain degree of authority when they get together and utilize it amongst themselves. In *Teutonic Mythology*, the Grimms state that "in our legends, birds converse together on the destinies of men, and foretell the future." This parallels the legend of the "parliament of rooks," a collection of birds who judge the spirits of the dead, which is to say, other birds. Birds have long represented the souls of the dead, flickering between earth and heaven. Egyptian iconography represented the *ba* and other portions of the soul as birdlike; the Babylonians had superstitious laws against killing birds (or bats, to be on the safe side) during the month of the dying god Tammuz. The Latin *aves* means both "birds" and "ancestral spirits." Even when they're not birds themselves, souls often travel to the afterlife courtesy of avian psychopomps such as ravens, hawks, cranes, whippoorwills, ibises -- or Valkyries, to bring Sigurd into this again.

The two notions of a parliament of birds and the voyage to the afterlife join in the famous poem *The Conference of the Birds*, (also translated, by the way, as "the language of the birds") by the Persian Sufi mystic Farideddin Attar (whose [head](#), in good [prophetic](#) form, continued speaking after a Mongol took it off in 1230). All the birds gather to seek out their god, the [Roc](#), or Simurgh. They pass through a series of initiatory valleys where various revelations and distractions carve off portions of the flock. Only thirty birds finally reach the seventh valley, the valley of the Simurgh -- where they realize that they, the initiate thirty birds (*si murgh* in Persian) are themselves the godhead.

*"Solomon was David's heir. He said, 'O men, we have been endowed with understanding the language of the birds, and all favors have been bestowed upon us. This is indeed a real blessing.' Mobilized in the service of Solomon were his obedient soldiers of jinns and humans, as well as the birds; all at his disposal."
-- The Koran, Sura 27:16-17*

Which gives another spin again to Solomon's armies of birds and jinns, as sanctified in the Koran. This may be the place to note that the Shakra people of Oman, who live near the ruins of [Irem](#), speak a version of Jibbali known to their neighbors as "the language of the birds." (Irem's towers, like the smoke of its frankincense and Nostradamus' allusions, rear toward heaven and flirt with demons.) Irem could thus provide not only wealth, frankincense, and jinn armies, but also linguistic instruction for the mighty Solomon. Note, again, the equation of knowing the language of

the birds with wisdom -- and, in this instance, with power. Birds in the mass serve as the voice of the gods; the Roman Augurs examined the flights of flocks of birds before advising the Senate on the properly sanctified course of action. The flight of a large group of birds attains a high degree of complexity; could an emergent consciousness be "stored" in a flock of birds, to be accessed by proper auguries? Properly designed, could a single bird fractally "represent" the mass-mind of the Si Murgh, the inhuman entity represented in the bird-like sphinx? Odin's ravens, Thought and Memory, serve as his "distributed consciousness," just as the birds become the eyes of the Japanese [scarecrow](#) god Shohodo-na-kami. The Language of the Birds becomes a kind of "assembly language" for a collective consciousness embodied in the "airy spirits" warned against by medieval witch-hunters.

"The doctor, though, was chiefly disturbed by the chattering night birds outside; a seemingly limitless legion of whippoorwills that cried their endless message in repetitions timed diabolically to the wheezing gasps of the dying man."

-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror"

Which brings us to the angels, the "messengers" who may also be the "diplomats" Fulcanelli alludes to so energetically. Remember that the cherubim are represented, in the most ancient traditions, as nothing but a flurry of wings. (The descending dove, meanwhile, grants the power of tongues at Pentecost.) The alchemist Zosimos, who remains diplomatically silent on the Language of Birds, clearly refers to the Language of Angels as the language of true alchemical power. Solomon used the powers of the hoopoe (another psychopompic bird) to command the services of the Queen of Sheba; against her will, she (the daughter of demons, no less) subjects herself to his blandishments. This eerily follows the description (ostensibly of the sundew plant) of the "Lingua Avis" by the 17th-century alchemist Isaac Hollandus: "If anyone carries this . . . the enemy will not have power over the individual, but must, in fact surrender . . ."

So from whence comes the Language of the Birds? From an alien mass-mind both connected to and rival of the great subterranean reptiles, carrying on the schizophrenic war of Mithras (whose servant was the Raven) and Tiamat, Roc and Leviathan, eagle and serpent. UFO contactee George Hunt Williamson maintained that the language of the (aquatic, serpentine) [Sirian](#) aliens was the same as the [Enochian](#) of the angels, and that the symbol of their linkage was the Eye of the Hawk-God, Horus. Could the primordial intelligences that linked birds and dinosaurs somehow have evolved outside time and dimension as we understand it? Imbibing the alien DNA of the Reptoids grants illumination, connection to the airy entities half-fallen from heaven. Is the blood of the dragon the key to the "Dive-Bouteille" of Rabelais, and perhaps the ecstatic wine of [Dionysos](#), which similarly exalts the soul on an astral, aerial journey? Where do human speakers fall -- satraps like Solomon, tools like Sigurd, or visionary warriors against both dragons and Amazons like Mopsus or Jason? Learn the Language of the Birds, and listen for instructions.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Adventuring Means Never Doing Paperwork

Hello, there! Welcome back. [Last week](#) we were talking a bit about making your heroes "exciting" . . . or, more correctly, making sure your character is of the sort to get into interesting situations. After all, those stay-at-home sorts are devilishly difficult to build good continuing adventures around (although they make perfectly good one-shot heroes . . . especially as nummy snacks for the elder gods).

Last time we offered some suggestions as to what *not* to do about those characters. This time we're going to look at some tips and tricks to make life interesting for characters that might otherwise be confined to a life of boredom; we'll be drawing our inspiration from watching lots of television, especially the plethora of boxed sets that have made it to market recently (although, sadly, we cannot draw any inspiration from the recent *Compleat Punky Brewster* nine-DVD set). Much of this advice applies to real-world professions and character concepts; more exotic locales generally offer - and demand - more interesting character choices. If you're playing a low-level education bureaucrat in the Galactic Federation while all your buddies are planet-hopping space cowboys, don't blame us.

"He's a dental technician who doesn't play by the rules . . ."

One of the most venerable techniques is to play a version of your profession that *isn't* tied down by the considerations of the profession . . . usually by bending or breaking the rules (written or traditional) of that profession. Do most forensic technicians spend most of their time in the lab? Yours goes out in the field, doing first-hand investigation. Do most doctors maintain a level of clinical distance between themselves and their patients? Yours takes a personal interest, doing what is necessary to make life better for his patients (either with or without the patient's knowledge). Do most truant officers concern themselves with the mundane day-to-day duties of rustling up errant kids? Yours believes in a world of magical conspiracy, and uses his badge to get places where *other* officers wouldn't be able to go. ("Yes, little Timmy Wilson was last seen looking for the *Tome of Infinite Bleakness* . . .")

Playing with this concept gives *lots* of room for interesting character motivations and plot hooks. Why does your character break the rules? Is it in a belief The System doesn't work? Because someone once made life better for him by breaking the rules? Because he's naturally curious? Your character will probably butt heads with his superiors a lot, making for interesting scenes, *and* you'll have reason to go on interesting adventures.

(Oh, and for an ancient television trick: Have your character hate paperwork; that'll free *lots* of time for adventuring.)

Modify the Concept

With a little bit of research, you may be able to find a concept that is similar to the one you want to play, only allowing for more freedom for adventuring. For example, playing an ordinary New York City homicide detective would ordinarily mean you're only allowed to investigate murders. *But* if you're a detective in the D.A.'s squad, then suddenly you have jurisdiction over high-profile or otherwise sensitive investigations (like kidnappings or interesting burglaries) . . . exactly the kind of useful range necessary for most roleplaying games.

Or what if, instead of being a university librarian, you're part of the university's Special Collections department . . . giving you jurisdiction to explore, investigate, and look for new additions to the special collections? That will still allow for most of the bookish librarian-type character concept, while giving a reason to be exciting.

Realistic Implausibility

A lot of professions allow for freedom under certain circumstances; if you talk to the GM ahead of time, it may be possible to make sure these situations arise (or seem to arise). For example, despite the insinuations otherwise of movies and television, most of the time an FBI agent *can't* become involved in an investigation, no matter *how* interesting it may seem; he usually has no jurisdiction, and must usually defer to local law authorities. *But* there are some exceptions; one of the more obvious ones that pops up in those rare stories concerned with plausibility is the illegal

transportation of a minor across state lines . . . in other words, if the agent believes there's a minor and a state line (or is willing to state he believed that), then he can get embroiled in all kinds of interesting adventures.

In-Game Latitude

If the campaign has any kind of fictitious (especially fantastic) element, it should be possible to use that as a catalyst to mold an otherwise realistic - if boring - profession into an exciting and adventure-filled career. For example, let's consider a child social worker. Now, most of the time they aren't the subject of city-shaking adventures. *But* in a world with superheroes, it's logical that they would have a social worker who specialized in issues involving metahumans (either powered children or children in difficult homes somehow touched by super-beings). Making the hero someone with this kind of jurisdiction should allow for all kinds of exciting adventure possibilities. (*The X-Files* is, of course, one of the most recent and successful examples of this technique; the show simply created weird phenomena, then created an agency specifically charged with tracking those phenomena down.)

Dramatic License

Finally, don't underestimate the ability to flash that dramatic license around to make it possible for your character to be exciting. Sure, in every other forensics department in the world the person who collects evidence is different from the person who interviews people, which is different from the person who actually analyses the information in the lab, but things are done differently in Townsburg; we have one person who does it all here! Sure, police detectives are ordinarily required to have partners and check in every few hours, but not so in *this* game world! Yes, it's generally frowned upon for network administrators to roam the streets carrying a concealed weapon in most places, but that kind of job is *really* dangerous and exciting in the world of *Switch d20!*

While hand-waving can make a lot of those kind of problems go away, it's imperative that the player and GM be on the same page when it comes to deciding *where* the limits of that hand-waving will be. If a player creates a computer-tech expert on the assumption that he will be someone similar to the black-ops breaking-and-entering protagonists in *Sneakers*, and the GM keeps him locked up in his office dealing with problems online because it's more realistic, there will probably be a problem. But if the GM knows that's what the player had in mind, he can warp the campaign around that.

It's easy to combine these techniques as necessary. For example, our hero the assistant district attorney may be someone who bends the rules occasionally, taking initiative and investigating things first-hand despite regulations. After a few successes he may be promoted to a specially created "district attorney investigative squad," in essence giving him sanction to do what he was already doing. Once he learns of the Magical Conspiracy (and proves it in-game), that task force may be rededicated to grant him full "Thaumaturgical Investigative Prosecutorial Powers" . . . directly tying him into the full campaign plot, while remaining (mostly) true to the original premise *and* allowing for exciting adventures.

Even the most sedate profession can prove rich and fertile territory for adventuring and exciting adventure possibilities, provided you're willing to bend the rules both in and out of game. Yes, the other professors and archeologists may scowl and roll their eyes at Indiana Jones, but *he's* still the one with the whip and the cool glowing grail.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: ***Terra Incognita: The NAGS Society Handbook***, p. 9.

(*Two stars*) "The jackalwere Asaph Abdul Anat, the current owner of the segments, never had the opportunity to learn anything about the *Rod* before becoming petrified by a medusa."

The Garage

Samples for *GURPS Vehicles Lite*

by **Kenneth Peters**

My job on the *Vehicles Lite* project was to test the system, look for rules problems and build vehicles. These are a few of the vehicles built to test the design system, and two aircraft that were built using components from *Vehicles Lite*; these hybrid designs show the strength of the book even if you already own the "full" system.

These designs are "out-takes" from the editing of the book, and can be used as design examples and sources of comparison.

Electric Car

This is a generic vehicle that could represent a possible near-future all-electric vehicle (as opposed to a gas-electric hybrid, see below). Visibility is good.

Subassemblies: Body +3, 4 Wheels +1.

P&P: 40-kW improved wheeled drivetrain, 120 kWh advanced battery.

Fuel: None.

Occupancy: 1 NCS, 3 NS. Cargo: 10 cf.

Armor **F** **RL** **B** **T** **U**

All: 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5

Equipment

Body: Airbags (all seats); burglar alarm; 4-man environmental control; sound system.

Statistics

Size: 15'×6'×4' Payload: 1,000 lbs. Lwt.: 2.31 tons

Volume: 198 cf. Maint.: 102 hours. Price: \$38,400.

HT: 12. *HP:* 150 *Whl:* 15 each.

gSpeed: 75 *gAccel:* 3 *gDecel:* 15 *gMR:* 1 *gSR:* 5

Ground Pressure High. 1/6 Off-Road Speed

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Body is 180 cf; wheels are 18 cf. Structure is light. It has improved brakes and improved suspension. Armor is standard composite. Mechanical controls. 1.4 cf of empty space in body. Empty weight is 3,620 lbs.

Toyota Prius

The 2001 Toyota Prius is a compact four-door sedan that uses a combination gas-electric drivetrain. Unlike a pure electric vehicle it recharges from the gas engine and does not require an external recharger. Depending on the situation the vehicle operates with just the 33-kW electric engine, the 56-kW gas engine, or both together for

TULA KBP TKB-799 Kliver Turret

The Kliver turret is a privately developed upgrade that can be installed on a number of vehicles -- such as the BTR-80, BMP-1, and even T-72 hulls. The turret has also been marketed for installation on naval patrol craft.

The turret seats a gunner to the left, with the 30mm cannon in the center and ammo on the right. The four SACLOS Kornet missiles are mounted on the right and above the main turret housing.

A full load of ammo is \$282,860. Visibility is good.

Subassemblies: Turret +3, Open Mount +2.

P&P: None.

Fuel: None.

Occupancy: CCS. Cargo: 0 cf.

Armor **F** **RL** **B** **T** **U**

Turret: 4/20 4/20 4/20 4/20 4/20

Weaponry

30mm autocannon/2A72 [Tur:F] (350 rounds) +3.

7.62×54mmR MG/PKT [Tur:F] (2,000 rounds) +0.

Equipment

Turret: Full stabilization for 30mm autocannon and 7.62mm machine gun; 12× telescope [F]; 5-mi. thermograph [F]; laser rangefinder; dedicated targeting computer w/software for

high-demand situations (hills and maximum speed). The gas engine is still used most of the time, with excess output routed to recharging the batteries -- a LCD display next to the driver shows the battery status and power management functions. The price of efficiency is a cramped passenger space (three people can fit in the rear seats only if they are very friendly). Visibility is good. A full load of fuel costs \$17.85.

Listed performance is with the gas turbine active. At the cruising electric drive output of 15-kW gSpeed is 45 and gAccel is 2. At full output the electric drive provides gSpeed is 70 mph and gAccel is 3. With both electric drive and gas engine active (86-kW) the gSpeed is 110 mph and aAccel is 5. There are actually two battery banks, a 2,000-kWs utility battery for the radio and environmental controls, and the remainder as the drive battery - which in standard usage is charged with 3,600 kW rather than the maximum 6,740 kW.

Subassemblies: Body +3, 4 Wheels +1.

P&P: 86-kW improved wheeled drivetrain, 53-kW improved std. gasoline engine, 8,740 kW advanced battery.

Fuel: 11.8 gallons gasoline (fire 11).

Occupancy: 1 NCS, 1 NCS, 2 CS. Cargo: 11.8 cf.

Armor F RL B T U

All: 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5

Equipment

Body: Receive-only radio; burglar alarm; airbags (NCS and NS); 5-man environmental control. External: Hitch.

Statistics

Size: 15'×6'×5' Payload: 1,307 lbs. Lwt.: 1.786 tons

Volume: 149 cf. Maint.: 141 hours. Price: \$19,890.

HT: 12. *HP:* 263 *Whl:* 30 each.

gSpeed: 85 *gAccel:* 4 *gDecel:* 15 *gMR:* 0.75 *gSR:* 4 Ground Pressure High. 1/6 Off-Road Speed

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Body is 135 cf; wheels are 13.5 cf. Structure is medium. It has improved brakes. Armor is standard composite. Mechanical controls. 5.1 cf of empty space in body. Empty weight is 2,285 lbs.

Kawasaki ZX-12R

Designed to compete with the Suzuki Hayabusa (see *GURPS Vehicles Lite*), the ZX-12R was introduced in 2000 as the flagship product in the Ninja line of motorcycles. It features a compact, high performance engine and a streamlined aluminum body shell. The rear passenger seat is covered when driven solo. It uses 5.36 gallons of gasoline per hour. A full load of fuel costs \$7.95. Visibility is good.

Subassemblies: Body +1, 2 Wheels -1.

P&P: 134-kW improved wheeled drivetrain, 134 kW improved HP gasoline engine, 605 kW lead acid battery.

Fuel: 5.3 gallons gasoline (fire 11).

Occupancy: 1 XCS (cycle), 1 XS (cycle) Cargo: 0. **Equipment**

Body: None.

Statistics

Size: 6.8'×2.7'×4' Payload: 431.8 lbs. Lwt.: 0.448 tons

30mm cannon. External (on Open Mount): 200-lb. dry hardpoint.

Statistics

Size: -- Payload: 1,162.6 lbs. Lwt.: 1.59 tons

Volume: 39 cf. Maint.: 51 hours. Price: \$148,720.

HT: 12. *HP:* 225 OM: 32.

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Turret is 35 cf. and open mount is 4 cf. Turret has a heavy frame with heavy compartmentalization. Armor is standard metal. Structure is sealed. 2.9 cf of empty space. Empty weight is 2,009 lbs. Four Kornet (AT-14) missiles in disposable tubes (50 lb. capacity) are fitted to the open mount hardpoint and are included in payload weight and cost.

Extra Detail: Reactive Armor

The rules given in *Vehicles Lite*, *Vehicles*, Second Edition and *Vehicles Expansion I* are based largely on guesswork derived from early examples. There is now significantly more information available about the capabilities of reactive armor. The following rules can be used for additional realism and accuracy.

Shaped-charges exploit the

Volume: 17 cf *Maint.:* 148 hours. Price: \$18,260.
HT: 12. *HP:* 30 *Whl:* 6 each
gSpeed: 195 *gAccel:* 15 *gDecel:* 10 *gMR:* 1.75 *gSR:* 3 Ground Pressure High.
1/6 Off-Road Speed

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Body is 15.2555 cf; wheels are 1.52555 cf. Structure is light, very expensive. It has improved suspension. Mechanical controls. Empty weight is 465 lbs. Design uses the extra detail option for top speed.

Ford Mustang GT Convertible

The 2002 Ford Mustang GT Premium Convertible is the latest in a long line of high performance 2-door sports coupes. The Mustang sits four people (two in front, two in back) and has a manual transmission, but automatic is available as an option. It burns 7.76 gallons of gasoline per hour. A full load of fuel is \$23.55. Visibility is good.

Subassemblies: Body +3, 4 Wheels +1.
P&P: 194-kW improved wheeled drivetrain, 194 kW std. gasoline engine, 2,000 kW lead acid battery.
Fuel: 15.7 gallons gasoline (fire 11).
Occupancy: 1 XNCS, 1 XNS, 2 XCS. Cargo: 11 cf.

Armor **F** **RL** **B** **T** **U**
All: 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5

Equipment

Body: Airbags (XNCS and XNS); burglar alarm; 4-man environmental control; sound system.

Statistics

Size: 15'×6'×4' Payload: 1,114.2 lbs. Lwt.: 2.247 tons
Volume: 143 cf. *Maint.:* 124 hours. Price: \$25,930.
HT: 12. *HP:* 262 *Whl:* 30 each.
gSpeed: 145 *gAccel:* 7 *gDecel:* 15 *gMR:* 0.75 *gSR:* 4 Ground Pressure High. 1/6 Off-Road Speed

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Body is 130 cf with fair streamlining; wheels are 13 cf. Structure is medium, standard. It has improved brakes and a convertible ragtop. Armor is cheap metal. Mechanical controls. Empty weight is 3,380 lbs. 2.8 cf empty space in body. Design uses extra detail option for top speed.

Dodge Ram Pickup

The 2002 Dodge Ram 1500 Quad Cab SLT is one of the larger production pickup trucks on the market. It burns 7.32 gallons of gasoline per hour. A full load of fuel is \$39. Visibility is good.

Subassemblies: Body +3, 4 Wheels +1.
P&P: 183-kW wheeled drivetrain, 183 kW std. gasoline engine, 8,400 kW

"Monroe" principle, in which the detonation of explosives around a shaped metal cone, usually made of copper, shapes it into a thin, hypervelocity jet that stretches out quickly (explaining why you can't use HEAT warheads at standoff distances). This jet, contrary to popular belief, is not molten or a plasma, nor is it a gas, nor does it melt through armor -- it penetrates armor like any other high-speed kinetic-energy penetrator. ERA disrupts this jet using "sandwiches" consisting (at its simplest) of two thin steel cover plates and an explosive filling. One or two sandwiches are installed inside a protective cassette and mounted outside the vehicle so that an impacting shaped-charge warhead will strike it at an angle. The explosive charge detonates when struck by a shaped charge's penetrator rod, propelling the plates into the path of the jet. The disruption of the jet significantly degrades the penetration of the warhead by consuming part of the jet's energy and imparting lateral velocities to much of that which remains. This disperses the energy of the jet over a much wider area.

When an attack strikes an area protected by ERA, roll 2d. Subtract 1 for every prior hit that resulted in a detonation. If the result is 0 or less, an unprotected area has been hit and the ERA has no effect. Otherwise, the ERA protects at its stated DR against that attack. It is assumed that the cartridges are slightly angled when installed, but multiply the listed ERA DR values by the slope modifiers of the area it is installed on.

lead acid battery.

Fuel: 16 gallons gasoline (fire 11).

Occupancy: 1 RCS, 1 RS, 3 NS. Cargo: 58 cf. (open)

Armor F RL B T U

All: 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5

Equipment

Body: Airbags (CCS and RS); burglar alarm; 5-man environmental control; sound system. External: Hitch.

Statistics

Size: 19'×7'×6' Payload: 3,476 lbs. Lwt.: 4 tons

Volume: 330 cf. Maint.: 112 hours. Price: \$31,575.

HT: 12. *HP:* 900 *Whl:* 90 each.

gSpeed: 105 *gAccel:* 5 *gDecel:* 15 *gMR:* 0.75 *gSR:* 4 Ground Pressure High. 1/6 Off-Road Speed

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Body is 300 cf., wheels are 30 cf. Structure is heavy, standard. It has improved brakes. Armor is standard metal. Mechanical controls. Empty weight is 4,698 lbs. 14.61 cf. empty space in body.

Lamborghini Diablo VT 6.0

The Diablo 6.0 was introduced in 2000 and incorporated a number of improvements over earlier versions. It is built almost entirely of carbon composite materials, with aluminum at key points for safety. It burns 18.225 gallons of gasoline per hour. A full load of fuel is \$39.60. Visibility is good.

Subassemblies: Body +3, 4 Wheels +1.

P&P: 410-kW improved all-wheel drivetrain, 410 kW HP gasoline engine, 3,888 kW lead acid battery.

Fuel: 26.4 gallons gasoline (fire 11).

Occupancy: 1 NCS, 1 NS. Cargo: 5 cf.

Armor F RL B T U

All: 2/4 2/4 2/4 2/4 2/4

Equipment

Body: Airbags (NCS and NS); burglar alarm; 2-man environmental control; luxury interior (NCS and NS); sound system.

Statistics

Size: 14.6'×6.7'×3.6' Payload: 658.4 lbs. Lwt.: 2.035 tons

Volume: 169 cf. Maint.: 62 hours. Price: \$101,200.

HT: 12. *HP:* 300 *Whl:* 30 each.

gSpeed: 205 *gAccel:* 12 *gDecel:* 15 *gMR:* 1.25 *gSR:* 5 Ground Pressure High. 1/4 Off-Road Speed

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Body is 170 cf. with good streamlining; wheels are 17 cf. Structure is medium, expensive. It has improved brakes and improved suspension. Armor is standard composite. Mechanical controls. Empty weight is 3,411 lbs. Design uses extra detail option for top speed. Lamborghini's have limited production runs and a high markup. A new Diablo will almost certainly go for 2-3 × the amount listed here.

ERA uses low-sensitivity explosives and will not explode except in special circumstances, even if struck by large-caliber explosive rounds or the cartridge is set on fire. The explosives will burn if directly exposed to a fire attack, but only after the protective armor is ripped away. This armor also protects nearby cassettes from being damaged by the detonation of their neighbors. However, record the damage taken by the plates that penetrates their DR. Every 100 points of penetrating damage destroys or disables enough sections to qualify as a "previous hit." Square the DR of the plates against concussion damage. When an ERA cassette detonates against an attack, it inflicts 2dx6 concussion damage to a rough cone facing away from the vehicle. A third of this damage is applied to the underlying armor.

Against tandem-charges first determine the damage of the precursor charge against the cassette, with only the "other" DR protecting (e.g, DR 50 for Generation 1), if the penetrating damage is 50 points or more it will destroy the cassette and allow the main warhead to hit the underlying armor. Otherwise the cassette will still function against the following warhead.

Generation 1 (Late TL7): Representing early developments, such as the Israeli Blazer (1982) and Russian Kontakt I (1984) systems. Protects with DR 1,000 against shaped charges. Provides DR 50 against kinetic-energy class damage and other attacks.

Nissan 350Z

The 2003 Nissan 350Z is a relatively inexpensive sports car that still maintains good performance. It burns 7.49 gallons of gasoline per hour. A full load of fuel is \$30. Visibility is good.

Subassemblies: Body +3, 4 Wheels +1.

P&P: 214-kW improved wheeled drivetrain, 214 kW improved std. gasoline engine, 3,000 kW advanced battery.

Fuel: 20 gallons gasoline (fire 11).

Occupancy: 1 NCS, 1 NS. Cargo: 6.8 cf.

Armor F RL B T U

All: 2/5 2/5 2/5 2/5 2/5

Equipment

Body: Sound system; burglar alarm; airbags (NCS and NS); 2-man environmental control.

Statistics

Size: 14.6'x6.7'x3.6' Payload: 656 lbs. Lwt.: 1.816 tons

Volume: 160 cf. Maint.: 120 hours. Price: \$27,340.

HT: 12. *HP:* 263 *Whl:* 30 each.

gSpeed: 160 *gAccel:* 8 *gDecel:* 15 *gMR:* 0.75 *gSR:* 4 Ground Pressure High. 1/6 Off-Road Speed

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Body is 145 cf. with fair streamlining; wheels are 14.5 cf. Structure is medium, standard. It has improved brakes. Armor is standard composite. Mechanical controls. Empty weight is 2,975 lbs. Design uses extra detail option for top speed.

General Motors Hummer H2 Sport Utility Vehicle

The latest iteration of the Hummer is the 2002 H2, a sporty redesign with a number of improvements to comfort -- and a drastically reduced sticker price. Although not as luxurious as some competitors it has superior off-road performance and is certainly more ruggedly built.

The H2 has a small cargo area, the rear seats are usually folded down to increase the available space. Alternately, another seat can be installed instead. It burns 9.44 gallons of gasoline per hour. A full load of fuel is \$48. Visibility is good.

Subassemblies: Body +3, four off-road Wheels -1.

P&P: 236-kW all-wheel-drive, 236 kW std. gasoline engine, 3,000 kW lead-acid battery.

Fuel: 32 gallons gasoline (fire 11).

Occupancy: 1 RCS, 1 RS, 3 NS. Cargo: 41.6 cf.

Armor F RL B T U

All: 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5

Equipment

Generation 2 (Late TL7): This includes most "mainline" ERA widely used by Russia and its customers, most notably represented by the Kontakt V system. Second-generation ERA uses thicker plates and sensitized explosives to provide additional protection against kinetic-energy rods by breaking up, deflecting or redirecting them. This a tricky design improvement as it makes the plates more vulnerable to penetrating low-caliber explosives and projectiles; the outside covering is thickened to prevent problems (and also gives additional resistance against tandem-charges).

Protects with DR 900 against shaped-charges, DR 300 against kinetic-energy class damage. Provides DR 140 against other attacks.

Generation 3 (Early TL8): Currently in development, these cassettes are designed to provide additional protection against ERA-defeating warheads by using a second, lighter, layer of ERA to stop the large precursor charges of modern antitank weapons. This supplementary ERA can take the form of pill or grid armor, light explosive tri-plates, or non-typical ERA shapes such as X's, hollow boxes, or tubes. When properly designed, the detonation of the supplementary layer will not disable the base ERA's capability against the follow-on charge. Heavy plates also provide enhanced protection against KE rounds.

Protects with DR 1,000 against shaped-charges, DR 500 against kinetic-energy class damage. Provides DR 200

Body: GPS; sound system; burglar alarm; airbags (RCS and RS); 6-man environmental control. External: Hitch.

Statistics

Size: 16'×6'×6' Payload: 2,024 lbs. Lwt.: 4.2 tons

Volume: 348 cf. Maint.: 90 hours. Price: \$48,545

HT: 12. *HP:* 450 *Whl:* 75 each.

gSpeed: 125 *gAccel:* 6 *gDecel:* 15 *gMR:* 0.5 *gSR:* 4 Ground Pressure High. 1/3 Off-Road Speed

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Body is 290 cf.; wheels are 58 cf. Structure is medium, standard. It has improved brakes. Armor is standard composite. Mechanical controls. Empty weight is 6,540 lbs. Rear seats (3 NS) are folding. A common accessory is a ST 25 winch (9,000 lb. towing). Actual curb weight (empty weight + gas) is about 6,400 lbs. but the design weight is close enough.

Variants: The 2003 H2 SUT (Sport Utility Truck) has a slightly beefier 242-kW engine and the cargo section is open-air. Decrease body volume to 270 cf. - wheels remain 58 cf. Add a 0.5-mi. range IR searchlight in a 0.2 cf. full-rotation open mount (5 HP). Empty weight of 5,840 lbs. \$49,460.

AM General M1025 Himmwv

The M1025 Armament Carrier is one the basic variants of the original M998 HMMWV that entered service in 1985. The major difference between the M1025 and M998 is the addition of a hard "clamshell" covering and an open mount for the installation of various heavy weapons. The most common configurations are a 12.7×99mm Machine Gun/M2HB with 2,000 rounds or a 40mm AGL/Mk 19 MOD 3 with 600 rounds. Most of the ammo will be stored as cargo. The M1025 burns 3.92 gallons of diesel per hour. A full load of fuel is \$30. Visibility is good.

Subassemblies: Body +3, four off-road Wheels -1, full-rotation open mount +1. *P&P:* 112-kW all-wheel-drive, 112 kW std. diesel engine, 3,000 kW lead-acid battery.

Fuel: 25 gallons gasoline (fire 9).

Occupancy: 1 RCS, 1 RS, 2 RS, 1 XRS. Cargo: 35 cf.

Armor F RL B T U

All: 3/8 3/8 3/8 3/8 3/8

Equipment

Body: 5-man environmental control. External: Hitch.

Statistics

Size: 15'×7'×6' Payload: 1,850 lbs. Lwt.: 3.89 tons

Volume: 322 cf. Maint.: 86 hours. Price: \$54,570.

HT: 12. *HP:* 750 *Whl:* 150 each OM: 32.

gSpeed: 85 *gAccel:* 4 *gDecel:* 15 *gMR:* 0.5 *gSR:* 4 Ground Pressure Moderate. 1/4 Off-Road Speed

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Body is 268 cf.; wheels are 54 cf.; open mount is 4 cf. (3.2 usable). Structure is heavy. It has improved brakes and puncture-resistant tires. Armor is standard composite. Mechanical controls. Empty weight is

against other attacks.

Explosive Reactive Armor

Type	Wt.	Cost
------	-----	------

Generation 125	\$50
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Generation 260	\$100
----------------	-------

Generation 3110	\$200
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Multiply weight and cost by the surface area of the location being protected.

Example

A tandem charge missile is fired on a tank with Generation 3 reactive armor. It strikes the side of the hull with no slope. The precursor charge inflicts 60(10) damage. The DR on the plates is 140, reduced to 14 from the armor divisor. This is enough to negate the precursor as it only does 46 damage to the cassette. This is the first hit so a cassette detonates and the flying plates inside impact on the fast-moving shaped charge jet. The main warhead inflicts 140(10). The reactive armor plate blocks 100 of that, and 40(10) strikes the underlying armor.

If it had hit the side of the turret with 30 degree slope the precursor charge would have had to penetrate 210 DR and it would have inflicted only 39 damage on the cassette. The shaped charge DR would have blocked all of the shaped charge jet.

5,941 lbs. Rear seats (2 RS) are folding. Common additions are a medium range radio with scrambler and a ST30 (6,000 lb. towing capacity) winch (changing the designation to M1026).

Variants: Variants listed after the slash are those with the winch.

M966/M1036: Identical to the M1025 except it has a 152mm SACLOS ATGM/TOW-2 launcher on the pintle mount and six rounds stored as cargo. The TOW launcher can be removed and used by the crew.

M998/M1038: The M998 lacks the hardtop of the M1025 as well as most of the armor. When configured as a cargo carrier it has two doors and a soft ragtop over the crew compartment (seats become XRS). The cargo area can be open or covered with a ragtop. When configured as a troop carrier there are 8 XCS with an optional cloth covering. In yet another configuration there are 2 XRS added, with the remainder being a cargo area. All of these versions lack the open mount, but it can be installed on non-U.S. configurations. For the basic cargo carrier configuration body becomes 150 cf (525 HP) and cargo changes to 55 cf (open) -- the wheels remain 54 cf. Armor is 3/5 cheap metal. New payload is 3,350 lbs. and empty weight is 4,733 lbs. \$41,010.

T-72S Shilden Main Battle Tank

The T-72S is the export version of the T-72B (Obiekt 184), which entered service in 1985. It differs from earlier versions in that it has improved armor protection and fire control, a larger 12-cylinder V-84 diesel engine, smoke dischargers on the turret, and a 2A46M Rapira cannon fitted with the 9M120 electronics suite that can fire and direct the 9M119 (AT-11) missile. The non-export T-72B has slightly better NBC protection, but is otherwise identical.

It uses 21.91 gallons of diesel fuel per hour. A full load of fuel and ammo is \$88,576.40. Visibility is poor. The turret rotates at 16° per turn.

Subassemblies: Body +4, full-rotation Turret +3, Tracks +2, limited-rotation Open Mount #1 +2; two Open Mounts #2 and #3 +2.

P&P: 626-kW tracked drivetrain; 626-kW std. turbocharged multi-fuel diesel; 27,200-kWs lead-acid batteries.

Fuel: 317 gallons diesel (fire 9).

Occupancy: 2 CCS (turret), 1 CCS (body). Cargo: 0 cf.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
<i>Body:</i>	6/1,400L	5/180	4/100	4/70	4/50
<i>Turret:</i>	5/1,500L	5/675	4/150	4/85	--
<i>Tracks:</i>	4/50	4/50*	4/50	4/50	4/50

* Plus DR 30L side skirts.

Weaponry 125mm smoothbore gun/2A46M [Tur:F] (39 rounds) +3.

7.62×54mmR MG/PKT [Tur:F] (2,000 rounds) +0.

12.7×108mm MG/NSV [OM:F] (300 rounds) +0.

Equipment

Body: Light amp. (driver); compact fire suppression; smokescreen; 3-man NBC kit. Turret: Full stabilization for 125mm gun and 7.62mm machine gun; medium-range radio with scrambler; 8× telescope (gunner); 8× telescope (gunner, for ATGM); 5× telescope (commander); 6× LLTV (gunner); 4× LLTV (commander); 1-mi. IR searchlight; laser rangefinder; dedicated targeting computer w/software for 125mm gun. Open Mount 1: Universal mount for 12.7mm machine gun. Open Mount 2/3: Two smoke/decoy dischargers with 8 reloads (hot smoke). External: Bulldozer blade; two 500-lb hardpoints.

Statistics

Size: 21'×8'×5' Payload: 5,228 lbs. Lwt.: 51.53 tons

Volume: 1,116 cf. Maint.: 15 hours. Price: \$1,575,845.

HT: 10. *HP:* 2,400 *Tur:* 750 *Tracks:* 900 each *OM1:* 22 *OM2/3:* 26 each.

gSpeed: 40 *gAccel:* 3 *gDecel:* 20 *gMR:* 0.25 *gSR:* 5 *Ground Pressure Low.* 2/3 *Off-Road Speed*

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Published loaded weights for the T-72B/S vary by up to 5 metric tons, design LWt. closely matches 46.5 ton figure so it was kept. Front and side armor on the turret and body were slightly reduced from the published maximum RHA equivalents, the DR values were averaged over the entire face rather than using the best armored section. Body is 530 cf. with 60° F slope and 30° RL slope. Turret is 260 cf. with 30° slope on F and RL sides. Tracks are 318 cf. Open mount 1 is 2.5 cf. and the other two are 3 cf. each. Body and track structure is extra-heavy, turret is heavy. Structure has heavy compartmentalization. Armor is standard metal except: turret front and body front is expensive laminate, turret RL and RL is expensive metal, track skirts are standard laminate. Sealed body and turret. Mechanical controls. 9.6 cf. of empty space in the body and 6 cf. in the turret for further upgrades. Empty weight is 97,838 lbs. Typical ammo mix for 125mm gun is 12 APFSDS (5 in turret), 21 HE (15 in turret), and 6 HEAT (2 in turret). Six 9M119 (AT-11) missiles are carried in the body.

Reactive Armor: Many T-72s are fitted with first-generation explosive reactive armor (ERA). A suite of Kontakt-I protects the front and sides of the body and turret. The plates add 3.25 tons to loaded weight and cost about \$325,000.

Variants: The T-72S1 is fitted with first-generation ERA but the gun is not capable of firing the AT-11 missile.

Kamov Ka-50 Chernaya Akula

The Ka-50 Chernaya Akula ("Black Shark") is a modern close-support helicopter that has been heavily promoted by Russia for the export market. Known to NATO as the "Hokum-A", the Ka-50 was incorrectly assumed to be an air-to-air combat helicopter when it was first reported. Initially given the marketing name "Werewolf" it was officially changed to Black Shark after a popular Russian movie by the same name popularized the term.

The Ka-50 is a single-seat design with coaxial counter-rotating rotors. Two small wings are mounted midbody, each with two hardpoints and a countermeasures pod mounted on the tips. The hardpoints are unusual in that movable mounts can be attached -- rotating down up to 12(. The body has an aggressive look, with retractable landing wheels and a streamlined fuselage with large windows. One of the most unique features of the Ka-50 is the pilot ejection seat: when activated, the rotor blades and canopy are explosively separated and the seat is launched, recovering even if it was launched while inverted.

The Ka-50 is one of the most advanced Russian helicopters in existence, but has had a number of troubling problems with pilot workload, compounded by the addition of advanced electronics but relatively primitive controls. The Russians have been aggressive in forming partnerships with France and Israel to upgrade the helicopters electronics and ease these problems -- the two-seat Ka-52 Alligator ("Hokum-B") and Ka-50-2 Erdogan (Turkish for "born fighter") were developed for this reason.

It burns 228.62 gallons of jet fuel per hour. A full load of fuel and cannon ammunition is \$5,935. Visibility is good.

Subassemblies: Body +4, two Multiple Main Rotors -1, two Stub Wings -2, three Retractable Wheels -1.

P&P: Two 1,600-kW MMR drivetrains; two 1,633-kW HP gas turbines; 4,800 kW advanced battery.

Fuel: 485 gallons jet fuel (fire 13).

Occupancy: 1 CCS. Cargo: 0 cf.

Armor **F** **RL** **B** **T** **U**

Additional *Vehicles Lite* Design Options

The Ka-50 uses *Vehicles Lite* and the following design features from the full GURPS Vehicles.

Ejection Seat: This option can be added to any seat. Depending on the system the pilot can be ejected through the bottom of the aircraft, or out the top. Explosive bolts will remove intervening obstacles to enable a safe ejection and are capable of removing the individual from the vehicle even if it is inverted. Once free of the vehicle a parachute will deploy. The seat includes an emergency rescue transponder and survival kit. Some systems also have the flight recorder storage unit in the seat.

Limited Life System: Functions as an environmental control system and provides enough bottled air, water and other life-support requirements to keep a person alive. Each module supplies 1 man-day of life support, minimum module size is 0.25 man-days (6 hours), anything less than that requires

Body: 4/15 4/15 4/15 4/15 4/15
Wings: 4/15 4/15 4/15 4/15 4/15
Rotor: 4/10 4/10 4/10 4/10 4/10
Pilot Compartment: -- 4/65 4/65 -- 4/65
Windshield: 4/20 -- -- -- --

Weaponry

30mm autocannon/2A42 [Bod:F] (470 rounds) +0.

Equipment

Body: Full stabilization for 30mm autocannon; three medium-range radios; long-range radio with scrambler; digital datalink with software; autopilot; military GPS; navigation instruments; IFF; inertial navigation system; HUDWAC; laser rangefinder [F]; laser spot tracker [F]; two advanced radar detectors [F/B]; laser sensor; computer terminal; small computer; flight recorder; compact fire suppression; ejection seat. *Wings:* Two advanced radar detectors; four smoke/decoy dischargers with 4 reloads (chaff or flare).

External (on wings): Four 1,500-lb. hardpoints. **Statistics**

Size: 53'x24'x16' *Payload:* 10,473.5 lbs. *Lwt.:* 13.871 tons

Volume: 402 cf. *Maint.:* 12 hours. *Price:* \$2,721,630.

HT: 12. *HP:* 1,800 *MMR:* 396 each *Wings:* 180 each *Wheels:* 50 each.

aSpeed: 265 *aAccel:* 4 *aDecel:* 34 *aMR:* 8.5 *aSR:* 3 *Stall speed:* 0.

Design Notes

Vehicles Lite design. Body is 350 cf.; each rotor is 7 cf.; each wing is 10 cf.; wheels are 17.5 cf. Body structure is extra-heavy, rest of frame is heavy. Body has heavy compartmentalization. Entire structure is made with expensive materials. No streamlining. Armor is standard composite on body, pilot compartment, stub wings, and landing gear -- expensive composite on window and rotors. Electronic controls. Fuel tank is light, self-sealing. Empty weight is 17,270 lbs. Performance is without loaded hardpoints. With hardpoints loaded aSpeed drops to 260 mph. Realistic top speed is considerably lower for fuel economy reasons (about 200 mph in most cases). 9.1 cf. empty space in body. Typical ammo mix for 30mm gun is 240 AP and 230 HE. Ammo is stored in an anti-blast magazine. Actual export price will be 4-5x the amount listed. Movable pylons should be purchased with casemate mounts for the attached munitions.

PZL-230F Skorpion

The Skorpion was the name given to a small single-seat SABA (Small Agile Battlefield Aircraft) that would serve as a close-support aircraft for the Polish Air Force. The project was canceled in 1994, but it had amassed considerable attention from around the world for its high-tech design and proposed capabilities. A full-scale mockup was constructed to showcase the project.

The final design, had it progressed to actual prototype stage, would have entered service in 2000. It is a short, stubby aircraft dominated by the bubble canopy and weapon pylons. The design was inspired by the A-10 in certain respects - notably the engines mounted high on the rear fuselage in separate pods and the capability to mount a massive GAU-8/A cannon in a special ventral hardpoint. The jet was designed to operate from unprepared landing strips and in harsh weather conditions, the wings and even part of the fuselage was modular and could be removed for quick replacement, maintenance, or to store the craft in tight spots.

It burns 375 gallons of jet fuel per hour. A full load of fuel and cannon ammunition is \$3,875. Visibility is good. A full load on the hardpoints is 7,700-lbs.

negligible space. Power requirement is multiplied by the number of occupants expected to use the system.

Laser Spot Tracker: This is a sensitive electro-optical device that can detect a laser-illuminated target within line of sight. Also referred to as a laser marked target seeker.

Additional Modules

Type	Wt.	Vol.	Cost	Power
Ejection Seat	100	5	\$50,000	
Limited Life System	200	4	\$1,000	0.5
Laser Spot Tracker	20	0.4	\$10,000	neg.

Retractable Landing Gear: Small wheels that can retract into the body (and thus not contribute to drag) multiplies the body volume by x1.075. *LBR Guidance:* The guidance system for a laser-riding SACLOS missile is not the same as a laser designator. For game purposes assume the functionality is included with the extra weight and cost of a gun-launcher or any laser rangefinder. By itself, treat it as a half-price laser rangefinder.

Subassemblies: Body +4, two Engine Pods -1, two STOL Wings -2, three Retractable Wheels -1.
P&P: Two 6,250-lb turbofans; 12,000 kW advanced battery. 125-kW electrical offtake from turbofans.
Fuel: 925 gallons jet fuel (fire 13).
Occupancy: 1 CCS. Cargo: 0 cf.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
<i>All:</i>	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5
<i>Pilot Compartment:</i>	4/15	4/15	4/15	--	4/15

Weaponry
 25mm 5-bar. Gatling/GAU-12/U [Bod:F] (250 rounds) +0.

Equipment
Body: Long-range radio with scrambler; digital datalink with software; autopilot; military GPS; navigation instruments; IFF; 10-mile radar [F]; HUDWAC; laser rangefinder [F]; laser spot tracker [F]; advanced radar detector [F]; laser sensor; computer terminal; small computer; flight recorder; compact fire suppression; ejection seat. External (on wings): Two 1,100-lb. hardpoints; four 500-lb. hardpoints. External (on body): One 2,500-lb. hardpoint; four 500-lb. hardpoints.

Statistics
Size: 30'x32'x13' Payload: 6,487.5 lbs. Lwt.: 7.222 tons
Volume: 362 cf. Maint.: 15 hours. Price: \$1,630,235.
HT: 7. *HP:* 188 Pods: 45 each Wings: 90 each Wheels: 10 each.
gSpeed: 250 *gAccel:* 17 *gDecel:* 15 *gMR:* 0.5 *gSR:* 2 Ground Pressure Extremely High. No Off-Road Speed *Empty Performance*
aSpeed: 680 *aAccel:* 18 *aDecel:* 16 *aMR:* 4 *aSR:* 3 Stall speed 80. *Loaded Performance*
aSpeed: 600 *aAccel:* 11 *aDecel:* 10 *aMR:* 2.5 *aSR:* 3 Stall speed 120.

Design Notes

Body is 240 cf.; each wing is 25 cf.; each engine pod is 20 cf.; wheels are 12 cf. Structure is light with very expensive materials. Good streamlining. Wheels have improved brakes. Wings have controlled instability. Armor is expensive composite. Computerized controls. Fuel tank is light, self-sealing. Pilot's compartment includes CS and ejection seat. Empty weight is 7,955 lbs. 7.3 cf. empty space in body. Typical ammo mix for 25mm gatling is 250 SAPHE. Ammo is stored in an anti-blast magazine. Design uses extra detail option for top ground speed. LWt is 11.072 tons with all hardpoints filled.

Mcdonnell Douglas/British Aerospace AV-8B Harrier II

The AV-8B Harrier II is arguably one of the most famous military jet fighters of all time. Capable of taking off and landing vertically (as long as hardpoint load was minimal) it could use even the most primitive landing sites and short runways for takeoff. Early versions were limited in tactical scope because of their lack of night operations capability and low bomb load -- but the latest Harrier II Plus adds a radar system and small precision-guided weapons let it carry sufficient striking power to the target -- barely.

It burns 714 gallons of jet fuel per hour. A full load of fuel, decoys, and cannon ammunition is \$906,200. Visibility is good. A full load on the hardpoints is 8,260-lbs. Typical operation is to take-off using STOL techniques but it will land normally at ground facilities; on ships it will land vertically -- saving fuel that otherwise would otherwise have to be reserved if a landing is missed.

Subassemblies: Body +4, two Standard Wings -2, three Retractable Wheels -1.
P&P: 23,800-lb vectored turbofan; 8,000 kW advanced battery. 238-kW electrical offtake from turbofan.
Fuel: 1,141 gallons jet fuel (fire 14).

30mm Autocannon Rounds

Type of Ammo	Weight	Cost
<i>Armor Piercing (AP)</i>	×1.5	×1.5
<i>High Explosive (HE)</i>	×1	×1

Occupancy: 1 NCS. Cargo: 0 cf.

Armor F RL B T U

All: 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5

Weaponry

25mm 5-bar. Gatling/GAU-12/U [Bod:F] (300 rounds) +0.

Equipment

Body: Long-range radio with scrambler; autopilot; inertial navigation system; navigation instruments; IFF; advanced bombsight; laser spot tracker [F]; two advanced radar detector [F/B]; two smoke/decoy dischargers with four reloads (chaff or flare); computer terminal; small computer; compact fire suppression; refueling probe; 0.5 man-day limited life support; ejection seat. External (on wings): Two 2,000-lb. hardpoints; two 1,000-lb. hardpoints; two 630-lb. dry hardpoints. External (on body): One 1,000-lb. dry hardpoint.

Statistics

Size: 46'x30'x11' Payload: 7,986.5 lbs. Lwt.: 10.579 tons

Volume: 661 cf. Maint.: 11 hours. Price: \$2,921,945.

HT: 9. *HP:* 600 Wings: 225 each Wheels: 60 each.

Empty Performance

gSpeed: 235 *gAccel:* 19 *gDecel:* 10 *gMR:* 0.5 *gSR:* 2 Ground Pressure Extremely High. No Off-Road Speed

aSpeed: 600 *aAccel:* 20 *aDecel:* 12 *aMR:* 3 *aSR:* 4 Stall speed 125 or VTOL.

Loaded Performance

gSpeed: 215 *gAccel:* 16 *gDecel:* 10 *gMR:* 0.5 *gSR:* 2 Ground Pressure Extremely High. No Off-Road Speed

aSpeed: 600 *aAccel:* 22 *aDecel:* 8 *aMR:* 2 *aSR:* 4 Stall speed 170.

Design Notes

Body is 515 cf.; each wing is 60 cf.; wheels are 25.75 cf. Structure is medium with very expensive materials. Fair streamlining. Armor is expensive metal and structure is sealed. Electronic controls. Fuel tank are light but not self-sealing: 416 gallons in body, 725 gallons in wings. Empty weight is 13,170 lbs. 5.3 cf. empty space in body. Typical ammo mix for 25mm gatling is 300 SAPHE. Design uses extra detail option for top ground speed. LWt is 14.709 tons with all hardpoints filled.

Variants: There are a number of major variants of the Harrier II, with each major user having its own specialized versions. Standard load includes fuel and cannon ammo. Loaded weight adds hardpoint load.

Night Attack Harrier II: The "Nightbird" is an upgrade of existing U.S. Marine Corps AV-8B's. It adds a second small computer, HUDWAC, 5-mi. thermograph [F] and digital vehicle camera [F]. This adds 42 lbs. and \$87,000. Reduce empty space by 0.84 cf.

Harrier GR. Mk 5: In service with the British Royal Air Force. Adds two 200-lb. dry hardpoints at the end of the wings, flight recorder, military GPS, and two smoke/decoy dischargers (in wings) with one reload each (chaff or flare). Remove military GPS. Change engine to 21,750-lb. turbofan (652.5 gph), increase empty space in body to 26.69 cf. and maximum hardpoint load to 8,660 lbs. Payload without hardpoints is 7,896.5 lbs. \$905,800 for a load of fuel and decoys. Cost is \$2,906,740 and EWt is 12,938 lbs. All were updated to the Mk 7 standard by 1994.

The Mk 5 was supposed to be armed with dual Aden 25mm cannons -- one on each side of the centerline fuselage -- with 100 rounds SAPHE each. The installation never worked out and the cannons were eventually dropped completely. A few aircraft had dummy pods fitted for carrying cameras or publicity, but there were never any operational cannons installed. Assuming they worked, these cannon pods would add 624 lbs., reduce empty space by 9.54 cf, and adds \$60,000. Ammo cost is \$880.

Harrier GR. Mk 7: Add a digital vehicle camera [F] and 5-mi. thermograph [F] to the Mk 5 loadout. Add 30 lbs. to EWt. and reduce empty space by 0.6 cf. Add \$81,000.

Harrier II Plus: All U.S. Marine Corps Harriers were converted to this standard by late 2001. It adds a 95-mi. radar [F] in an elongated nose, a second small computer, digital datalink with software, military GPS, HUDWAC, 5-mi.

thermograph [F] and digital vehicle camera [F]. It also adds two 200-lb. dry hardpoints at the end of the wings in the same fashion as the RAF Mk 5/7. Length is 47' and body volume is increased to 530 cf. with wheels 26.5 cf. 7.6 cf. empty space in body. Add 542 lbs. to Ewt. and \$471,020 to cost.

Tulamashzavod 2A42, 30MM×165MM, Russia, 1976

A KBP Instrument Design Bureau design, the 2A42 is a dual-feed autocannon in widespread Russian service, used by vehicles as varied as the BMP-2 IFV, Ka-50 attack helicopter, and ZSU-30-2 SPAAG. It has two selectable rates of fire: RoF 5* and RoF 9*.

The improved 2A72 (1990) incorporates an improved feed mechanism and is lighter overall (185 lbs.) but has a fixed rate of fire (RoF 5*) -- it is used on the Patzyr-S1 self-propelled air defense system, BMP-3, and BTR-80A, among others.

General Electric GAU-12/U, 25MM×137MM, United States, 1983

The GAU-12/U is a five-barreled gatling gun used on the AV-8B, AC-130U and LAV-AD.

Royal Ordnance Aden 25, 25MM×137MM, United Kingdom, 1983

The Aden 25 was an ill-fated adaptation of the larger 30mm Aden Mk4. It is a revolver cannon firing standard NATO 25mm ammunition.

Machine Gun, Autocannon and Grenade Launcher Installation Table

Weapon	Weight	Volume	Cost	Power	WPS	VPS	CPS	TL
Automatic Cannons								
<i>25mm 5-bar. Gatling (GAU-12/U; US)</i>	270	5.4	\$43,000	11.5	1.1	0.0073	\$4.40(3)	7
<i>25mm Autocannon (Aden 25; UK)</i>	202	4.04	\$30,000	0	1.1	0.0073	\$4.40(3)	7

Gun Statistics Table

Weapon	Ammo	Malf.	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	RoF
Gunner (Cannon)									
<i>25mm 5-bar. Gatling (GAU-12/U)</i>	APFSDS	ver.	cr.	6d×3(2)	20	14	1,500	6,000	50
	SAPHE	ver.	cr./exp.	6d×3(0.5)+1d-4[2d]	20	14	1,500	6,000	50
<i>25mm Autocannon (Aden 25)</i>	APFSDS	ver.	cr.	6d×8(2)	20	16	2,100	9,000	60
	SAPHE	ver.	cr./exp.	6d×4(0.5)+1d[2d]	20	14	1,400	6,000	60

Selected Reading

When researching civilian vehicles the best references are found at product review sites and the companies own information resources. Everything from the exact amount of cargo cubic feet to the curb weights of the vehicle can be found, and often more detail then can possibly be used. Many company websites offer downloadable pamphlets that give detailed information on their vehicles that are very useful.

Military vehicles, even well-known examples such as the T-72, are much more difficult to research. Although Jane's

and other resources provide a wealth of detail they often lack information that is basic to GURPS Vehicles and *Vehicles Lite* -- such as armor protection, fuel capacity and batteries. Even so, these resources often provide enough information to draw informed conclusions, and judicious tweaking of a design can result in amazingly realistic results.

- *Jane's Armour and Artillery*: An excellent resource for getting general information on all manner of military vehicles.
- *Jane's Armour and Artillery Upgrades*: Especially useful for information on turret systems.
- *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*: Be sure to check the old and outdated volumes for bits of information that may have been edited out of later volumes. Old volumes are also often the only place to find information on cancelled aircraft projects such as the PZL-230F!
- "[Roadblock](#)": This article by Onno Meyer and Hans-Christian Vortisch has a number of armored vehicles built using GURPS Vehicles.
- "[Heavy Metal](#)": The Leopard 2A5 would make a good opponent for the T-72S.

Pyramid Review

Godsend Agenda

Godsend Agenda

Published by [Khepera Publishing](#)



Written by Jerry D. Grayson

Additional writing by Brian Vinson, Jason Tondro, & David Thrush

Art by Matt Drake & Renee Grayson

224 b&w pages; \$23.95

2002 continues to be the year of the superhero game, opening with the return of the venerable *Hero System* and *Champions* and soon to close with the massively-open-content *Mutants & Masterminds*. Almost unnoticed in this wave is a book from Khepera Publishing, *Godsend Agenda: Super heroic [sic] Roleplaying*. Don't be fooled by the subtitle. This is not a comic book superhero game. What is it, then? Let's examine the book and the general mechanics first, and then the "Godsend Agenda" setting, and perhaps we can approach an answer to that question.

The book is a full-size 224 page trade paperback . . . a good size for a core rulebook. The front cover is a fashionable deep brown, with the title, subtitle, and a symbolic icon representing one of the major factions of the setting world. The back cover features some color art of major characters. Interior pages are comfortably laid out, with a few graphical embellishments to the margins that do not intrude on the reading experience. Sidebars are presented with a mock-papyrus background; this has been done before -- badly -- in the *Hercules & Xena RPG*, but the background chosen here is light enough as not to interfere with seeing the text.

Line art mixes with grayscale throughout, with a full 41-page graphic story leading the book, and setting the stage for the setting. The grayscale pieces, alas, come off generally less well, probably because of the vagaries of converting full-color illustrations to the gray tones. Compare the very rich illustration of an Angelos warrior on the back cover to its monochrome counterpart on page 164 to see what a loss not being able to include more color plates can do. Color plates are, alas, quite expensive, so the publisher can't be faulted. Hopefully future products will find ways to make the conversion from color to black-and-white work more in their favor.

The rules system is a fairly straight-forward Attribute + Skill + 2d6 vs. Target Number . . . a well-proven approach to the rules. (The mathematically-inclined will quibble with the "graininess" of a 2d6 roll; this game's focus is less on simulation and more on story-telling, so the relatively constricted 2d6 distribution is not an obstruction.)

Characters are built with an uncomplicated point-based system, buying Attributes, Skills, Advantages, and Powers, and getting extra points for taking character Flaws. Powers have their own Add-Ons and Flaws to make them more or less potent. Again, there's nothing particularly remarkable in choosing this sort of design; it's worked well for a couple decades now. *Godsend Agenda* has something of an advantage in that it works with simpler and smaller numbers, like *Silver Age Sentinels* does, instead of larger numbers and trickier math, like often found in *Hero System* or *GURPS Supers*.

Combat is divided into roughly five-second rounds; combat actions are not simultaneous -- if you are taken out before your Initiative comes up, you're out of luck. Each character has a certain number of combat Action Points to exercise when his opportunity rolls around; actions are taken from a very basic list (move, attack, dodge or parry, aim, ready,

get up). The basic combat rules take up four pages of the book; special options take up another six. That makes ten pages only for combat . . . a remarkably concise presentation for any game. The combat section is prefaced by a combat sequence in nine pages of comic format; after those rules, five of these pages are revisited with annotations describing how they actually played out using the rules. This device (rules presented in comic book format) is very powerful and used all too seldom, possibly because it is a relatively complicated task to design . . . applause to the authors and artists for giving it a go.

It should be noted that the text is rife with grammar faults, the usual misspellings, several miscalculations in sample characters, and no index. None of these have ever been particularly unusual in the hobby game industry, but those who are bothered by such things should be warned. It is also noteworthy that the "conversational" tone of the prose occasionally veers towards what may be intended as comical but could be viewed as insulting. The warning on the back cover is a prime example: "This book is not recommended for the Amish or the faint of heart." Political correctness can be overdone, but so can cheerful irreverence . . . this book personally crossed the line several times on the latter score.

So far we have a book which is neither outstanding nor awful -- just a run-of-the-mill game book. But what about the setting? (For those who don't care for spoilers, skip on to the last "conclusion" paragraph.)

Earlier it was noted that *Godsend Agenda* was not particularly a comic-book-hero game. There's nothing in the rule systems to prohibit that, of course, and those rules would make a perfectly serviceable engine for any light story-driven supers gaming. But it's the setting that puts *Godsend Agenda* into a category of its own.

Umpty-thousand years ago, the nobility of an alien race developed the ability to master arcane energies and give themselves astounding powers. To fuel their leader's expansionist appetites, these aliens created the "Godsend Agenda," where small groups of the empowered would camp out on primitive worlds, pass themselves off as gods, see to the conversion of the native population to their purposes, and move on. This worked well except for two problems: the rise of a rebel who thought the special powers should be available to all their kind, and the contacts with another alien race of hive-mind bent and equally opportunistic.

Fast-forward to roughly 4000 BCE, when a prisoner transport ship carrying empowered rebels and their empowered guards is attacked and boarded by the hive-aliens. In a desperation move the guards push a panic button on the space drive, opening a rift in space-time and dropping the prison ship (and its occupants) into the Atlantic Ocean off Florida.

From this point the timeline reads like one of Von Daniken's fever dreams. Along the way we have the empowered spreading out across the earth, still utilizing the "Godsend Agenda;" an advanced race of humans on Atlantis; wars between alien and alien, Atlantean and alien, and so on; genetic tinkering with the human race; the reappearance of the hive-aliens; and the emergence of empowered humans (thanks to the prior gene-tweaking).

It's now 2010; the wars for control of the Earth still go on, but in smaller scale and in the background. Superheroes are here, but very few understand where they really came from and what they really want. Mankind is beginning to push out to bases on the Moon and Mars. There's an air of optimism in the society, but a dark undercurrent of suspicion and mistrust as well.

Several supplements are in the works, each addressing one of the factions established in the setting; a second printing of the core book is planned which will repair assorted flaws in the text. An adaptation for the *d20 System* has been announced as well.

Summed up, then, *Godsend Agenda* is an unusual fusion of the conventions of comic book heroics with the themes of the alternate-history/secret conspiracy genre. It's less a comic-book-hero game than a graphic-novel-hero game. If handled well, this concept has legs and sufficient weirdness for most audiences. At the current price point (less than most core rulebooks these days), *Godsend Agenda* is a worthwhile investment for its detailed background and undemanding rules set. It's worth a look.

--Bob Portnell

Lovecraftian Supers

Using the Mythos to Power Your Metahumans

by Joshua Marquart & Chad Underkoffler

What unique benefit does combining the Cthulhu Mythos with the Supers genre grant?

Many gaming super-hero worlds have a common basis from which the majority of superpowers spring. *Aberrant* Novas have an M-R node, *Brave New World* Deltas survived trauma, Talents from *Godlike* alter reality by will alone, *GURPS Wild Cards* aces and jokers are affected by xenovirus Takis-A, heroes from the DC universe often have a metagene, and many folks from the Marvel world claim mutant DNA as their origin. A common basis serves as a single "point of departure" from the Real World, and helps make the existence of these strange abilities consistent. This article chooses to use the Cthulhu Mythos as the point of departure for superpowers; in a "Lovecraftian Supers" game, the possibilities for tying the abilities and motives of a character to the Mythos are endless.

Clearly, neither the Mythos nor the supers genre can survive unchanged when mixed; they must alloy into something new. With careful (and quiet) miscegenation between Lovecraft's ideas and common comic book tropes, only players well versed in the Mythos may twig to the inspiration. Of course, some players may want to know about this alloy upfront, so that they can embrace it. GMs should figure out whether or not their groups will appreciate or despise the concept before they decide about disclosure.

Rather than plunking the Mythos down into a super-hero campaign by having the PCs track down some cultists and slug it out, incorporation of Lovecraftian ideas should be subtle, insidious, corrupting, and at the core of the setting. Remember, it's a point of a departure, not an "Enemy of the Month." The squamous and rugose concepts of Lovecraft and his collaborators serve as an enabler for superpowers, not an obstacle.

A character need not be a full-fledged "Mythos beast," though this is not out of the question. An important concern is that most who gain strange powers in Lovecraft become corrupted, or outright evil; to act otherwise would be a departure from the "accepted" Mythos norm. However, to become inherently evil would be against the super-hero norm and rightly terrify the humanity heroes are sworn to protect. Perhaps true heroism in such a setting is the PC's individual personal sacrifice: as a being of strong will and ideals, he suffers a slow decline for the good of all.

Sanity Loss

When integrating the Mythos into a super-hero setting, the theme of insanity brought on through knowledge of -- and exposure to -- the Secret Truths of the Cosmos should be reduced. The incredulous sensation of seeing a flying man should (at the most) be a minor shock, especially if fly-bys happen daily. Furthermore, a reasonable response to the sight of a flying man could very well be wonder rather than terror. Considering that *being* the flying man would be even more detrimental to sanity, sanity loss from Mythos-derived power usage should be reduced, if not eliminated.

Loss of mental stability could become more situational, restricted to horrific/shocking encounters and revelations only, and the *Call of Cthulhu* rules for minor or no sanity loss on repeat encounters should be enforced. On the other hand, it might not be a bad idea to allow minor sanity loss for seeing superpowers in use, at least until it becomes commonplace. In this instance, a super would be forced to hide his ability, use it secretly, or not use it at all. This sort of covert super-humanity would be a great basis for a "crypto-super" campaign, along the lines of Warren Ellis' *Planetary* or even M. Night Shyamalan's *Unbreakable*.

A GM should select between different levels of sanity deterioration for super-abilities observed or utilized:

- *Mild*: While not raving loons, supers tend to be loopier than the average joe. After all, one has to be a little

cracked to dress up like a creature of the night or a circus performer. A powered individual is more neurotic than the most folks: haunted by nightmares, susceptible to amnesia, or wracked by odd compulsions. In cases of mind control or severe head trauma, a super's mentality could regress to that of his empowering Mythos creature or master.

- *Medium*: The heroic will of the super keeps his dark side in check. However, he must be eternally vigilant, so as not to slip and fall from the moral high ground. His mantra is, "With great power comes great responsibility," for it would be *so* easy to let go and run amok among fragile humanity.
- *Mighty*: It's a losing battle. Constant use of superpowers pushes the hero to the brink of insanity, yet he must brave personal destruction for those who cannot protect themselves. Each day is a scrabbling slide into madness as the hero pursues his or her muscular altruism. The little victories keep him sane, but one significant failure could send him over the edge.

Of course, system-specific solutions to sanity loss may already exist; *Aberrant's* "Taint" mechanic could easily reflect being co-opted by dark, nameless forces.

Super-Normals and Gadgeteers

December 19th, 2002 -- I had the dream again, in the place of the customary nightmares. Cyclopean buildings blocking out what little sky is visible, perception altered, twisted, not my own . . . looking down upon myself and I'm not me . . . Same details noted in previous entries. Also have discovered discrepancies in my youth, during my times abroad, unaccounted expenditures I don't recall making. And my manservant will not enter the "new" (to me, but obviously much used) chamber in the cave. He has expressed concern over my questions, explaining that I specifically requested secrecy and obedience regarding these matters when they were made. I have no recollection of these requests. Those missing days are haunting me. Meditation has been no help. It's beginning to affect my performance. Desperation may require regression aid from the Martian, an option I'm reluctant to pursue.

A hero with no superpowers is similar to a typical *Call of Cthulhu* investigator, but usually rather more capable. They may (or may not) have encountered the Mythos through adventuring, investigation, supernatural encounters, possessed relatives, bestowal of estate, etc. All the cliché "PCs meet the Mythos" situations are applicable, but it's not every wealthy industrialist who can invent a flying suit of armor equipped with force-fields and repulsor rays, become the World's Greatest Detective, or accurately shoot (aerodynamically unsound) trick arrows. These heroes might rationalize their abilities as a result of hard work, dedication, and inspiration, when it's possible these talents come from far beyond mortal understanding.

Yithians

The Great Race of Yith consists of mental time-travelers who hijack Earthly bodies for modern day excursions. Dwelling in the distant past, Yithians have the ability to contact and swap minds with beings in other times. They are particularly interested in human history. In most cases, the memories of the swapping experience are removed through mechanically aided mind erasure.

Years before a PC hero became "super," a member of the Great Race could have swapped minds with him. Since Yithians value intelligence above all else, abducted heroes would have high intellects. While mentally trapped in the past, the PC might have learned alien technological secrets as he related world events to his cone-shaped captors. Meanwhile, his own body was possessed by the Yithians and used for exploring his world, unearthing things best left buried, or performing unspeakable deeds. Once the hero's mind returned to the present, memories of the erased interrogation may have eventually resurfaced on their own (or through hypnotic regression). The hero probably has confusing visions of his experience, which become confabulated with dreams, pre-abduction memories, and other mental debris. His abused mind produces weird blueprints, theories, concepts, and ideas he believes to be his own. His crime-fighting devices might be based on misremembered Yithian designs, such as powerful Lightning Guns and time-

slowing Stasis Cubes -- super-technology easily recognized by Yithians, and strangely familiar to other abductees. Agents of the Great Race could eventually come calling to eliminate, recruit, or even re-possess the faulty erasure.

A hero may be allowed to keep his memories if he becomes an agent for the Great Race. This job entails performing the occasional secret -- often illegal -- mission. The Great Race is also not above funding eccentric researchers (using the bodies and resources of the time-swapped) for justice or villainy . . . someone has to pay for henchmen salaries and 401k's. Airplanes that convert into submarines don't come cheap, either.

With such resources, the Great Race may attempt an experiment of their own: vigilantism. They desire experiences: what better way to learn about supers than to take their places, swapping minds with known heroes (and/or villains) or even inventing their own using a possessed body? Yithians using high technology or the occasional incantation can easily simulate superpowers. Characters with no prior motivation towards vigilantism or arch-criminality might unexpectedly reverse gears under mental possession. A hero's (possibly unknown to even him!) dark secret may come to light as psychics reveal him as a human possessed by an alien mind, or a character may awaken one day as a physically fit millionaire playboy with ownership of a fully equipped crime cave . . . and no memory of the last five years.

Psychics

" . . . clawed at the steel walls as though I could tear them with my fingers, head pounding, body raked by my own nails, blood everywhere. Jean tried to stop me, but against my will I broadcasted to her what I heard: the horrible song, the terrible cry, the mocking chant, repeated over and over through that thrice-damned mutant detection machine! Tekeli-li! Tekeli-li!"

Psychic power is prevalent in the Mythos; legend has it that the secret to unlocking telepathy is hidden in the *Necronomicon*. Psychic ability can be used to detect the alien mental patterns of Mythos entities. Psychics and non-psychics alike are subject to the telepathic influences of the Great Old Ones, especially Cthulhu, whose telepathy and dreams work to provide him with human worshippers. R'lyeh's -- and consequentially, Cthulhu's -- rising in the 1920s drove psychic sensitives insane and may have triggered latent powers in others; this event could be repeated when the stars are right and the waters recede, no longer blocking Cthulhu's dreaming. The deep-dwelling Cthonians are telepathic, and have controlled humans in the past. The lost underground Native American tribe known as the K'n'Yan are purported to own the secret of telepathy (as well as immortality and immaterialism, or the ability to pass through solid objects). Supers who are psychic could gain their abilities from any of these groups directly (by right of birth or gift) or indirectly (by theft or accident).

Insects from Shaggai

Shan, the Insects from Shaggai, have been known to share visions of their history and technology with the human hosts they possess. The pigeon-sized Insects ethereally fly into human brains, where they can influence thoughts, plant impulses, and evoke visions; mostly, however, they crawl around in the victim's mind at night, savoring fears and neuroses. This process may trigger a host's latent psychic ability. Perhaps all telepaths are (or have previously been) possessed by Shan! An unsuspecting Shan overpowered by a powerful mind could provide the host with numerous abilities, including knowledge of their dark science and the other strange powers of the Shan, such as their neurowhips. The best-known remedy to rid oneself of a possessing Shan is exposing it to sunlight via trepanation, itself long recognized in some subcultures as a way to increase brain performance and open the third mystical eye.

The Dreamlands

The young boy descends warily into the darkness, all sounds of the subway station trailing off into the distance. He counts seventy steps until the flickering torchlight plays across his

*vision, revealing two harshly named men. They guide him, not towards the Steps of Deeper Slumber, but through the Cavern of Flame, past the prisons of the Great Old Ones, to the Rock of Eternity. High above the Great Abyss, wizened Nodens calls for an aide to his vigilance. Fate foretold that the child's dreaming essence would harbor the responsibility of the Outer Gods: vigor and fortitude harvested from **Shub-Niggurath**, with raw power and forgotten knowledge of the idiot god **Azathoth** bound by the Elder Signs of **Mnar**, all channeled through the secret name. Bathed in the crystallizing red-gold light of Hypnos himself, the young marvel swears to captain the fight against the machinations of the Great Old Ones, thus forever altering his waking destiny.*

Certain psychically powerful sleepers can naturally access an alternate dimension of sleep known as the Earth's Dreamlands. The Dreamlands enforce a "medieval/renaissance" level of technology across the land: any invention not in existence and in general use for over 500 years in current planetary culture (each planet has its own Dreamlands) cannot exist. Dreamers may live in different circumstances in the Dreamlands than the waking world: a beggar's dream self may be a mighty king, while a CEO is a galley slave. Though the young always have special access to these fields beyond what we know, powerful narcotics, spells, and certain artifacts allow adult waking-worlders to enter the Dreamlands.

The Dreamlands are malleable; dreamers can alter their reality, creating weapons, castles . . . whatever they need through willpower alone. Though never noted in the Lovecraftian canon, a dreamer might even imbue his dream self with superpowers or produce potent mystic artifacts. But without the ability to transfer such things to the waking world, his empowered form and magical trinkets are stuck in the realm of sleep. An amazing ability would be to bring one's dream self into the waking world, or perhaps to harness the power to alter reality as if it were the Dreamlands! The Crystallizer of Dreams, an artifact guarded by the Elder God Hypnos, may permit this ability.

Peripherally, when a powerful dreamer dies, he may end up permanently in the Dreamlands. What better way to bring back a long dead adversary or noble hero than to have him reappear as a manifestation of pure dream? (Hector Hall, white courtesy phone . . .)

Elder Gods

Interaction with Greek, Norse, and other pantheons is commonplace in super-hero comics. Demigods of these have even joined various super-teams. Why can't the divinities of the Cthulhu Mythos join the fun? Within the Mythos, the entities most benevolent towards humanity are known as the Elder Gods, who are best visited through the Dreamlands. Supplicated with rituals and sacrifice, they may provide favors such as the loan of a fantastic beast or a bestowal of mythical power.

The three most prominent Elder Gods of the Mythos are:

1. Nodens, the Great Lord of the Abyss and former head of the Celtic pantheon, who wields an oaken staff, rides in a seashell chariot drawn by fantasy beasts, and commands the nightgaunts.
2. Hypnos, the Greek god of sleep.
3. Bast, feline Egyptian goddess of pleasure and cats, who has mated with humans to create demigods. Her worshippers can speak with cats, and she may allow the temporary transfer of a human soul to a feline body.

All could provide favors to humans in the form of appropriately themed superpowers.

Spellcasters

"That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange eons even death may die.
Yet ruthless Fate is forever new,
Order's Lord, the Dread Na[indecipherable]"

-- from the writings of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred

Witchcraft, demonology, voodoo, and alchemy are traditional and dangerous methods of spell casting in the Mythos. Sorcerers rely on musty tomes, cryptic incantations, and obscure rituals for their spells, with the inevitable corruption from continued exposure to Mythos magic. In addition to the erosion of sanity, the consequences of corruption are generally derived from the sorts of conjuring performed. While uncommon in modern times, true wizards safe from corruption are prevalent in both ancient Hyperborea (the age of Conan) and the future continent of Zothique. Spellcasting heroes could be time-tossed wizards from either period; scions of these incorruptible traditions, here to redeem a fallen magical world; or driven mystics, throwing themselves into the breach to fight fire with fire.

Standard Horror Tropes

The more "humanoid" Mythos beings are likely candidates for super-heroism right out of the box. Witches, ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and even zombies can double as PCs. Each comes with a pre-selected suite of powers and weaknesses. Slap tight and a mask on a typical horror monster, and how many residents of a super-hero continuum could tell the difference? If creepy old Vlad dropped the formalwear and the Old Country accent, tossed on a slouch hat, covered his face with a scarf, broke out a pair of .45s, and went out to fight crime, few would realize his true nature.

Mythos Ghouls

While similar to werewolves, the canine Mythos ghouls are quite different and powerful. They can burrow through earth, travel to and from the Dreamlands through hidden tunnels, and access the memories and assume the physical form of anyone whose brain they eat. Perhaps a villain's return from the grave is due to a ghoul chowing down on his tasty mad scientist mind and being overwhelmed by the villain's personality. With exposure to the right (wrong?) artifacts or rituals, humans can even become ghouls. A hero thus exposed and unwillingly transformed could be a challenging character with interesting powers: strength, durability, tunneling, extra-dimensional travel, and a distasteful but rewarding dirty secret. A ghoul's only weakness is a quirky fear of the ankh, though many depend on the flesh of decomposing humans for survival.

Mythos Zombies

Mythos zombies are usually not mindless flesh-eaters; they remember the past as it exists in what's left of their deteriorating brains, and are unable to feel much in the way of physical pain. The Great Old One known as Glaaki impales its potential servants with a spike, creating an undead being who must follow the beast's whim, but who shares Glaaki's expansive knowledge. Servants of Glaaki look normal except for a livid spot where they were speared. After 60 years, a Servant exposed to sunlight will be corrupted by the "green decay" and destroyed within hours. Zombies reanimated through scientific means are injected with special formulae and continue to "survive" even after "essential" parts, such as a head, are removed (the scientific reanimation injection might be derived from Glaaki's venom, or may be a totally different formulation with other vulnerabilities). A zombie hero with great willpower might be able to resist the commands of its master, Glaaki. Also, a cult in Temphill, England, attempted to reanimate the dead for mating purposes, in order to develop supernaturally-powered offspring; heroes or villains alike may hail from this bloodline.

Our Solar System

Analysis indicates fungal subject had potential for development into indistinguishable humanoid simulacrum. Though lacking chlorophyll, unknown process for hyper-photosynthesis is evident, theoretically granting advanced abilities far beyond mortal men. Subject reacts unfavorably to non-UV light and physically degrades upon exposure to radiation of unknown ore discovered near crash site. Subject capable of processing

knowledge quickly. Cranial area aligned for possible receipt of telepathic commands. Recommendation: location of additional "birthing matrixes" high priority. Corporation retrieval teams sent to Colorado, Oklahoma, and Kansas.

--LL

In the comics, interplanetary aliens are customarily humanoid. According to the Mythos, humans were actually a byproduct of Elder Thing experimentation, so human-like space aliens are generally out of bounds. This could foil most of standard star-born super-hero concepts. While non-humanoid super-heroes are not unknown, they are extraordinarily rare, and could be more of a challenge as a PC than player or GM wishes to deal with.

Mythos Alien motives are unpredictable, but popular choices seem to be conquest, experimentation, exploration, and invasion. Many Mythos races have already conquered portions of the galaxy, including many parts of our solar system. Mi-Go invaders have taken over Pluto (a.k.a. Yuggoth) as well as areas of the dark side of the moon. Star-travelling pyramids carrying the Shan penetrated Uranus (L'gh'yx) before arriving on Earth. The Great Old Ones Atlach-Nacha and Tsathoggua originally hail from Saturn (Cykranosh). Even our asteroid belt was formed when a meteoric Seed of Azathoth burrowed into Thyoph and spawned, destroying the planet. Renegades or refugees from any of these conquered or destroyed worlds could make serviceable space-based super-hero concepts.

Floating deep in the reaches of space lies the Great Library of Celaeno, a repository of forbidden knowledge. It houses millions of alien documents of potentially limitless power, but is defended by a never-resting guardian who ensures no book is ever checked out. A person studying there could potentially emerge with limitless power (and a case of sanity loss).

Mi-Go

Technologically advanced, emotionless, interstellar fungi, the Mi-Go have been visiting Earth to mine certain exotic minerals not found in other parts of the universe. Their mastery of eldritch alloys (to create their technology), and arcane mathematical equations (forming a representation for rituals), make the Mi-Go modern-day successors to the Elder Things. They continue their fell experiments, especially on humans that get in the way of their mining. Mi-Go equipment includes biotechnological armor that grafts itself to the user as an alien symbiote, freezing cloud projectors, jolting electric guns, and the notorious brain cylinders used for interstellar human transportation.

Made from the Tok'l metal of Yuggoth, brain cylinders/canisters contain certain liquids to allow the brain to function without a body. Mechanical hookups to the cylinder allow the brain to interact with its environment. What self-respecting robotic hero wouldn't go a little bonkers when he discovers his brain cylinder was designed by a space-faring race of quasi-dimensional mushrooms? Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green* sourcebooks provide an excellent modern day reinterpretation of Mi-Go and their abuse of biotechnology that would present a challenge to any super-hero.

Serpent People

The race of serpent people has dwindled on Earth. They are reclusive, albeit powerful, hermits. Talented scientists and sorcerers, they worship Yig, the Great Old One. They have often performed genetic experimentation, and have a talent for creating poisons and other alchemical serums. Clever at disguising themselves, they might easily walk among humans. An influential serpent person would make the perfect leader of a secret terrorist organization or the eccentric mentor for a world-changing super team. Or a particularly brash serpent person could duke it out in the front lines for justice or villainy, heir to a dying race.

Deep Ones

"By the hoary hosts of shoggoths!"

The Deep Ones are amphibious marine humanoids, with super-strength and a minor communicative telepathic ability, devoted to the worship of Cthulhu. They crossbreed with humans to replenish their bloodline. Hybrids look normal, except for a goggle-eyed, fish-faced, in-bred "Innsmouth look" that they develop over time. Most eventually hear a calling to the sea, and (d)evolve into true Deep Ones. A rogue hybrid can make a convincing aquatic adventurer, so long as it has the will to fight the instinctive calling to serve Mother Hydra and Father Dagon.

Other submarine heroes and would-be heirs to Atlantis should take heed to avoid the cities of the violent Deep Ones, who have sunk mighty ships to defend their territory. They should also steer clear of other underwater locales like R'lyeh (where dwell Cthulhu and Zoth-Ommog) and Mu (the ruins of which trap Ghatanothoa). Squamous Rex!

Shoggoth

Originally created as servitors for the Elder Things, the black protoplasmic shoggoths can be commanded by Deep One priests using specialized telepathic rituals. Rarely found abroad, most shoggoths guard hidden vaults, though one haunts the Sargasso Sea. Though normally brutal and idiotic, some shoggoths develop clever intelligence, and have mastered control of their bodies to take the form of men. These superior types may change their form as they please, though hiding their many maws presents a challenge. A heroic shoggoth of the intelligent sort, freed from Deep One command by a botched ritual, could be a challenging selection for a super-being PC.

Independent Beings

Many independent beings of the Mythos are also excellent sources of super-ability. Mutation from a Colour out of Space could produce sentient plant-life, or the ability to drain life force. The worship of Yidhra and exposure to her presence can cause a human to develop bestial traits. Exposure to the blue ichor from the Hounds of Tindalos could provide cross-dimensional movement through angles, much like a Hound itself, though this will likely draw attention from the soul-eating hunters.

Great Old Ones

Iä Nyarlothotep, Crawling Chaos, messenger of the Outer Gods.

Iä Nyarlothotep, the thousand formed, embodiment of power cosmic.

Iä Nyarlothotep, spawn of Xyen-La, world of seven suns.

Iä Nyarlothotep, Surfer in Silver, herald to Azathi Galactic.

Iä Nyarlothotep, the Blackened Racer, taker of souls.

Iä Nyarlothotep, Zhaq-Kyrvi ftagn.

The Great Old Ones were once possibly Elder Gods, cast down for their dark magic practices by the Elder Gods themselves and imprisoned on Earth (and other planets). They will eventually awaken and free themselves to again challenge the Elder Gods when the stars are right. Entering the service of a Great Old One could result in the bestowal of unique traits and abilities, but at the cost of humanity. Normally favors are granted only to high priests or those with special devotion, but Great Old Ones can have their own motives for presenting any worshipper with a "gift," such as an attempt to weaken the walls of their prison.

Immortality is the usual gift, though abilities akin to those of the supplicated are not out of question . . . at a cost. The reptilian Yig may bestow poison resistance, serpentine qualities, and the ability to communicate with snakes to his followers, but will send his serpents to slay those who cross him. The Wendigo and others of Ithaqua's race can transform humans into servants who can generate and endure cold and fly through space, but this usually requires the practice of cannibalism. Though trapped by guardian spirits in western Germany, worshippers can perform rites to access the power and vitality of Cyaegha; however, these devotees will perish the day it is freed as it exacts vengeance for its entrapment. Appeals to Hastur could provide the caller a Byakhee, a clawed and winged interstellar-travelling beast, as a steed. Nyogtha has taught spells to his followers in exchange for sacrifices or contributions of personal mystical energies. The faithful who invoke Tsathoggua could also be given spells or even magical gates. A fire-casting

super may be directly channeling his power from the flaming Cthugha itself.

Though not regarded as canon Mythos by many, a gift of superpowers could result from an encounter with Kthanid (the "reverse-Cthulhu") or Yad-Thaddag (the "good" Yog Sothoth). Faced with the choice between something sanity-strippingly evil and something mind-blastingly good, which would you choose?

Outer Gods

The Outer Gods have been referred to as "cosmic forces personified." Azathoth, the Idiot Chaos, represents radiation; Shub Niggurth, the Black Goat with a Thousand Young, is the Outer God of fertility; Daoloth, the Render of the Veils, perception; and Yog Sothoth, the Lurker at the Threshold, commands time and space. Worshipers, even inadvertent ones, might be granted portions of an Outer God's power. For example, Azathoth insanity could produce a fever lending great strength and dedication; the milk of Shub Niggurth has been known to physically enhance endurance and mutate the body; Daoloth's favored are blessed with pre- and post-cognitive ability as well as cross-dimensional travel; harnessing the power of Yog Sothoth could allow one to warp space and travel through time. Of course, none of these abilities would be without their cost: with great power, comes great risk of insanity.

The Outer God Nyarlothotep is a being of a thousand forms. He is cosmically powerful, in a class with Darkseid, Mephisto, Loki, Thanatos, and other such four-color entities. The Mighty Messenger of Azathoth's court, he has been theorized as the personification of their telepathic influence on mankind.

While in theory all-powerful, Nyarlothotep is restricted based on the form in which he manifests, shaped by the beliefs of his worshippers, constrained by the manner in which he is summoned, and twisted by his own intended purpose. Two of the Crawling Chaos' more interesting aspects include Ahtu, who may be summoned through the use of a golden bracelet; and the Dark Lord of Koth, who will bestow wealth and a hundred year lifespan to those who beseech him (in exchange for the caller's soul upon death). Other forms include the horrifying Bloody Tongue, the bat-like Haunter of the Dark, and the proud and cunning Black Pharaoh. With so many forms and so many places to be all at once, it is a wonder "the beast" can keep track of his alter egos. Is a cosmically powerful hero or villain simply an aspect of Nyarlothotep gone rogue?

Artifacts of the Mythos

"Golly, that elasticity serum sure was tasty. Like mother's milk."

Whether metallic wings forged from alien metal or cosmic rings of unbridled energy, many super-foci are external devices, found or fabricated rather than being innate. Numerous Mythos artifacts are receptacles that bestow power when used properly, or doom the wielder to damnation when used (im)properly. Reading mystic tomes can provide spells, unlock mental potentials, or even trigger physical alterations if certain formulae/concepts are comprehended.

Its current location a mystery, the Ring of the ancient wizard Eibon can release a demon who will answer any questions it is asked (and potentially more). The Ring of the Hyades, which can transport the wearer across the universe and protect from the Great Old Ones, is hidden to all but the greatest of sorcerers. The legendary Time Clock allows physical passage to other times and dimensions, while mental and spiritual time travel can be achieved through use of the Liao Drug.

While most star-faring Mythos beings such as Byakhee and Mi-Go can fly naked through space on cosmic winds, subsisting on their own power, only a draught of "space mead" can provide a human direct protection from the harsh conditions of vacuum and space and allow him to breathe the aether.

Nyarlothotep has been known to bestow incantations and machinery on his faithful, which generally lead their wielders to madness and self-destruction. Whether bequeathing a non-euclidean lantern or providing the final equation to a gamma bomb, the Crawling Chaos is always up to no good. Not to worry, the Haunter of the Dark aspect of Nyarlothotep can be controlled via the Shining Trapezohedron, which can also reveal visions of other spaces and

times, and accelerate mutations to their final result, something any villain in a world of mutant-hating humans can appreciate.

Adventure Seeds

- *The End of the World as We Know It*: A strange planet has been sighted moving to intersect Earth's orbit. Researchers discover that the "planet" is actually Ghroth, an Outer God believed to have caused the dinosaur extinction. Can the heroes stop it in time before it opens its cyclopean red eye and sets the stars right (or wrong, as the case may be)?
- *Family Resemblance*: The Formless Spawn of the Great Old One Tsathoggua, black tar-like entities of great strength, are rampaging through a small farming community. Captain Elastic is on the scene, but reports indicate that instead of fighting the Spawn, he has joined them!
- *If the City is a-Rockin' . . .* : Shudde-M'ell -- Great Old One leader of the Cthonians -- most powerful of its ilk, is free to roam the Earth, creating earthquakes. The downtown buildings of the PC's major metropolis cannot handle the continual stress, so they must stop, contain, or draw Shudde-M'ell away. Additionally, a number of buildings have collapsed already, and heroes might be needed to aid in rescue and relief efforts.
- *The Gotham City Syndrome*: The city has become infected with a never-ending series of crime sprees and corruption. No matter how many insane criminals are put away, nothing ceases this degradation into depravity. Turns out a lloigor has made it's nest underground and is mentally influencing the population with its trademark perpetual suicidal pessimism and gloom. Mass reports of headaches and poor sleep can help clue researching PCs in to the immaterial dragon's feeding before the situation becomes psychokinetically explosive, literally.
- *Beyond the Fortress of Solitude*: The Elder Things (a.k.a. the Old Ones) came to Earth billions of years ago, After warring with various other alien races, they were driven to what is today known as Antarctica. There, they created Ubbo-Sathla, progenitor of the Shoggoths and all earthly life; then they died off. Their crystalline technology lies buried in the Antarctic, guarded by Shoggoths, rare Elder Things, and the dread Ubbo-Sathla itself, who flows over the Elder Keys -- tablets of forgotten Old One knowledge. Adventurers could discover Ubbo-Sathla's lonely Fortress, and be changed by the experience. A projection device, which opens a rift to the Great White Space (a dimension allowing transport across great distances; a phantom zone used and abused by the Elder Things) could serve as the catalyst for many mind-bending super-abilities. However, beware -- while it might be used somewhat safely as extra-dimensional storage, travel through this "Negative Zone" risks encountering minions left by the Old Ones.

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Pyramid Review

Traveller d20

Traveller T20 (for d20)



Published by [Quiklink Interactive/RPG Realms](#)

Adaptations and Rules for d20 by Hunter Gordon

Written by Martin J. Dougherty and Hunter Gordon

Art by David Mattingly, Steve Bryant, Paul Daly, Chad Fidler, Bryan Gibson, Jason Millet, Allen Nunis

448-page hardback with 16 color plates; \$44.95

In what has been a long life for an RPG, there have been many reiterations of Marc Miller's *Traveller* universe. Some -- like *Mega-Traveller*, *Traveller: The New Era*, and *T4* -- have fallen by the wayside, while others can still be found on the shelves at your local games store today. Modern editions of the game -- such as *GURPS: Traveller* and *GRIP: The Traveller Edition* -- have been recently rejoined by the Far Future Enterprises collected reprints of the original *Classic Traveller*. These three different sets of game mechanics give both GM and player plenty of choice in selecting the rules they want to play in what is essentially the same setting; now they are joined by a fourth option.

Traveller T20 gives the *d20 System* its very first hard science fiction setting and rules set. Until the advent of the *d20 System*, playing *Traveller* using any set of *Dungeons & Dragons* rules would have been difficult at best; where *Traveller* placed its emphasis on skills and a character's prior history, *Dungeons & Dragons* remained a class- and level-based system that did little for either skills nor prior history. In the scant few years since its release, the *d20 System* has shown itself to be flexible across a wide range of genres and settings, and this is set to increase with the release of *d20 Modern*. That said, *Traveller T20* is not a variant of *d20 Modern*, which raises the question: Is the *d20 System* flexible enough to handle hard science fiction and *Traveller*?

Traveller is set in the far future, in approximately the year 5638AD, a thousand years after the founding of the Third Imperium. This is a feudalistic empire dominated by humaniti, spanning hundred of parsecs. The Imperium actually governs certain worlds and space itself, allowing most member worlds to govern themselves. Travel between star systems is limited by the maximum distance a ship can jump (up to six parsecs) and a set amount of time whatever the distance jumped (exactly seven days). Thus the transport of goods and ideas is quite a slow process through the Imperium. In this setting, characters are freelance fortune hunters, traders, or mercenaries, having served four or more years in a prior career and getting themselves involved in adventures and intrigue. The setting also allows for a variety of different campaigns and games.

Quiklink Interactive and RPG Realms launch the *Traveller T20* line with *The Traveller's Handbook*, a weighty tome that -- like the first three volumes of *Classic Traveller* -- covers the mechanics and gears of the setting, but with only a smattering of details about the setting. It is cleanly laid out and easy to read; much of the black-and-white artwork has graced previous *Traveller* books, so is of a decent enough standard. The color artwork is also pretty good, organized into sets of pages spaced throughout the book. Some of it is rather superfluous, often being just a colorized version of a black-and-white piece that appeared earlier in the book. While reasonable enough, the space for this colorized reproduction and collation could and should have been put to better use . . . providing more samples of the rules in use, for example.

To get the most out of *The Traveller's Handbook*, the *Player's Handbook* is almost a necessity. "Almost" because little of the rules from the *Player's Handbook* make into this book; really, what the *Player's Handbook* provides is more of a basic explanation. The character creation is much the same as in the *Player's Handbook*: Choose a race and roll up a 1st-level character. There are two new attributes that are rolled up as normal: Education (a measure of a character's general knowledge) and Social Standing (a measure of his place in society and how others might react to him). Unlike prior reiterations of *Traveller*, *The Traveller's Handbook* includes several alien races to play -- Humans (mixed heritage, Vilani, Solomani, Zhodani, plus the amphibious minor human race, the Luriani and the genetically altered, four-armed Sydites), the Vargr (wolf-like bipeds), Aslan (bipedal lions), Ursa (genetically uplifted bears), and the alien Virushi (a four-legged, four-armed centauroid rhinoceros-like species). Rolling for home world gives up to three basic skills and possible feats. For example, anyone from a High-Tech world gains both the Pilot skill at Rank 0 and the Vessel/Grav feat.

There are 16 classes detailed in *The Traveller's Handbook*. The core classes are Academic, Barbarian, Belter (asteroid miner), Mercenary, Merchant, Noble, Professional (a technically orientated and flexible class that covers journalism, medicine, engineering, administration and so on), Rogue, and Traveller (professional adventurer). The military and semi-military Army, Navy, Marines and Scouts are termed as service classes. In addition, there are three Prestige classes -- Ace Pilot, Big Game Hunter, and TAS Field Reporter. The TAS -- or Traveller's Aide Society -- provides help and support to travellers throughout the Imperium.

Once a 1st-level character has been created (2nd level if playing a Ursa character, 4th if a Virushi character), it is ready to play . . . but that wouldn't really make it a *Traveller* character. For each class, there is a Prior History table that puts a character through anything up to five or more four-year terms of enlistment. For each term, experience points are awarded for service, survival, and possible commission, promotion, and decoration, as well as a straight experience point bonus. All this must be rolled for as a series of attribute checks; should a player make them all, a character can earn 10,000 xp or more! These points are then directly applied to the character and can result in them gaining between one and three levels per four-year term. In later terms, this level gain slows as each becomes more costly to reach. Prior to actually entering a profession, a character can attend university and will receive experience for each bachelors, masters, and doctorate program he completes.

As a character goes up in level, the player needs to flip back and forth through the first 140 pages of *The Traveller's Handbook*. They need to check a table of Experience Levels general to all classes, which provides both feats and the occasional attribute increase (useful to offset *Traveller's* inherent attribute increase due to age), another table particular to each class and that class' Prior History table. This is a lot of flipping back and forth, and this could have been negated through better organization. It is eased by the Prior History worksheet, which is a necessity and let down by differences in experience award details between the sheet and the book's text.

One option allowed under the *d20 System* -- which was only possible with great difficulty under previous editions of *Traveller* -- is that of taking of one or more careers, or multi-classing. As long as the character qualifies for the new class and the GM allows it, he can switch to the new class without difficulty, thus gaining better combat abilities and a wider range of skills to reflect the player's wants or the character's history. Thus you could create a Noble who gained a law degree at university and then served in the Navy, a Rogue who backed up his criminal activities with time in the Army, or a medical student attempting to pay off course fees by working as a merchant ship's medic. Although poorly explained, the inference is that a player should be encouraged to multi-class.

The end result is a character that is at least 3rd level, although he is probably between 5th and 7th . . . or possibly be even higher. Characters will have one or more classes; they may hold award, decorations, titles, and deeds to a starship and possess a wide range of feats and skills. They may also be as old as 38! There is a reasonable example of the process, but there should have been more, showing how university and multi-classing works.

The default *Traveller* setting encompasses technological epochs from the Stone Age to High Interstellar and beyond . . . Skills and feats reflect this, with most characters being from reasonably advanced societies. New skills include Gunnery, Liaison (which replaces Diplomacy), and Technical (a new cascade skill that covers Computers, Mechanical, Electronics, Gravitics, Engineering, Communication, Medicine, Astrogation, Sensors, and Trader). Other cascade skills are expanded to take account of life in the Third Imperium, with the Profession skill now adding Administration,

Hunting, Prospecting, and Survey to its skill list. Some skills work in tandem with feats -- the Pilot skill enables a character to operate a vessel for which they have the correct feat (Vessel/Grav, Aircraft, Spacecraft or Starship) while the Drive skill does the same for Vehicle feats. Each skill is fully described and includes details of possible skill tests and checks needed both during a game and to hold down a job.

Feats represent proficiencies (vessels, weapons, armor and vacc suit), innate abilities (Acting Prodigy, Natural Compass, Miracle Worker, and Trustworthy), learned skills (Xeno-Medicine, Naval Architect, Electronic Warfare Specialist, and Zero/Low-G Adaptation) and social elements (Connections, Credit Line, and Tolerance -- which represents the Aslan ability to deal with foreign and alien barbarians). Psi Talent and Natural Talent are for psionics-using characters, giving access to psionic training. Although psionics are covered in *The Traveller's Handbook*, they are really an aside, and their acquisition could have been better explained with more examples.

Combat can be a big part of any *Traveller* game, and must be able to cover shootouts; melee between animals, player characters, and NPCs; and vessels and starships from the surface (and underneath) out into deep space. Characters have Stamina instead of hit points to represent minor wounds and fatigue, with an increase gained for each new level; a new statistic, Lifeblood, represents the amount of trauma damage a character can suffer. Equal to the Constitution attribute, it makes for very deadly combat when firearms and energy weapons are involved. Hit points for vehicles are represented by their Structural Integrity Points. Armor not only makes a target harder to hit, but has an Armor Resistance (or AR) factor as well. For each point of AR, the lowest die of damage rolled is ignored, thus protecting the armor's wearer. If a hand weapon is used against a vehicle more dice are removed; in turn, vehicular weapons do more dice of damage against human and animal opponents. Although the lowest dice rolled is removed first, it can lead to oddities where better protection is offered against weapons that roll higher dice for their damage. Melee weapons do the standard damage of the *d20 System*, while a pistol does 1d10, a rifle 1d12, a laser rifle 3d10, while fusion and plasma weapons require multiple rolls of d20s and d12s.

Under the basic rules, starship and vehicular combat is dealt with as a roleplaying exercise, much as is standard for this type of game. It becomes more tactical in the advanced rules, which require hex maps and either tokens or miniatures to represent miniatures. The combat rules cover just about every type of action that can be taken during an engagement, while adding a number of new and clearly marked rules additions and modifications.

The book contains descriptions of all of the equipment and gear standard to most versions of *Traveller*. This includes daggers (plastic); body pistols; laser rifles, carbines, and pistols; fusion and plasma guns; battle dress (powered combat suits); inertial locators; fast and slow drugs; and even a janitorial kit! Medical technology includes pseudo-biological enhancements or cyberware, RNA memory implants for instant skills, and cloning. A large list of illustrated vehicles, spacecraft, and starships is given along with illustrations, but alas without floor or deck plans. The vehicles range from ground cars to grave belts, ATVs to G-Carriers, and steamships to submersibles. All of the standard starships are given beginning with the 100-ton Type S Courier, the Type A2 200-ton Far Trader, and the Type R 400-ton Subsidized Merchant. The list includes some 13 different ships, and is backed up with a chapter on "travelling" that covers interstellar voyaging, starship operations, space-borne encounters, and speculative trading. Of course, the GM is not limited to the many vehicles given in the book, and there is a set of design sequences in an earlier chapter that allows anyone to create almost any vehicle.

The rules for system and world creation have been revised from *Classic Traveller Book 6: Scouts*. They are not exact, striving for detailed playability over scientific plausibility. What they create are the physical, political, and social aspects of individual star systems and the planets within them. Curiously, since the rules have been revised from *Classic Traveller*, they are not classified as Open Gaming Content, although any worlds resulting from their use are considered to be Open Gaming Content. This chapter also includes rules for handling planetary environments and hazards as well as creating various animal types to fill a world's ecological niches.

The last chapter in *The Traveller's Handbook* is on *Traveller* campaigns and adventures. This discusses whether the tone should be heroic or gritty, before looking at the various types of campaign that have become common over the last 25 years of *Traveller* gameplay. These are free trader, military, political/intrigue, and straight adventuring; while the advice is good, only the free trader type is expanded upon as an example. For those curious, *Traveller T20* awards experience points for completing whole adventures, dealing with a patron or a random encounter, reduced or increased

depending upon an adventure, or encounter's difficulty. Experience points can also be gained for good roleplaying, working on the job and even taking a week off!

Where *The Traveller's Handbook* is lacking is in providing specific details of its default setting, the Third Imperium. This is just as much a problem with other *d20 System* handbooks, such as the *Player's Handbook* and the [Starfarer's Handbook](#) for Fantasy Flight Games' *Dragonstar* setting, where rules are favored over setting. Of course, the potential referee for a *Traveller T20* game is free to raid previous versions of *Traveller* for background information, and anyone familiar with the setting will be able to use these rules to run their game. Still, although the *Traveller T20* rules are built around the Third Imperium setting, this is as much a hard science fiction tool kit as it is the mechanics for play within the Third Imperium. Referees will have to wait until the release of *Gateway Domain Campaign* book to learn more of the background.

Yet on the strength of the rules alone, *Traveller T20* can be counted as a success, because it feels far more like a *Traveller* game than it does a *d20 System* game. In particular, the use of the Prior History table to fuel level gain during character generation is quite neat, and the deadliness of combat is going to force players to think their way out of situations rather than relying upon their guns. Above all, *Traveller T20* should be counted as a solid addition to the family of *Traveller* games, one that feels similar to the little three books (and more) of *Classic Traveller* instead of some Johnny-come-lately.

--Matthew Pook

(with thanks to Roj at Wayland's Forge)

Taking Orders, Taking Charge

by David Bareford

With the recent release of many World War II-based games, more campaigns than ever are based around soldiers, and an increasing number of players are stepping into the combat boots of military characters. One of the hallmarks of army life is the chain of command: the strict hierarchy of rank that determines every soldier's place and fate in the world. By contrast, most gaming groups interact as democracies (if not anarchies), and placing one PC above the rest is an unusual dynamic. Here are a few ways to give your military campaign that realistic, you're-in-the-army-now feel without stomping on someone's feelings or turning your gaming table into a one-player show.

Start 'em equal or make 'em pay. The best way to avoid problems of command is to start all the soldiers at the same rank. If everyone begins as privates (or sergeants, lieutenants, etc.) no one has any official command over anyone else. In essence, the party has suddenly become a democracy. Starting as privates allows players to figure out things like game mechanics and the nature of the campaign world before they are called upon to give orders. Additionally, even after their first promotion (typically to Private First Class or Corporal), they are still low-level enough that they are not expected to issue a lot of commands.

If the party members begin with different ranks, make them spend the points the game requires for military status/rank/power of the appropriate level, and pay attention to the prerequisites and other necessary skills for the position. Depending on the beginning points available to the players, this should keep rank levels fairly manageable, or create "90-day wonder" characters that have rank and leadership but very few other skills. Such characters place a great reliance on the more competent (though subordinate) characters; officers like this, especially 2nd lieutenants, were common in the later stages of the war.

Keep a sense of perspective. When a player's soldier outranks yours, try to roleplay appropriately. There is a place for the rebellious lone-wolf, but if everyone rejects authority, the sense of military organization evaporates quickly. Try to follow out the orders as given, voicing any disapproval at appropriate times through the proper channels.

Conversely, if you are in command of other players, don't seize the opportunity to boss everyone around. Everyone is at the gaming table to have fun; your officer should be a leader, not a puppet master. Try to keep the group together and involve everyone. Feel responsible for their well-being as a character and enjoyment as a player; don't view them as henchmen or extensions of your character.

Learn to love being a grunt. Not in charge? Who cares? You don't have to be a major or even a lieutenant to play an interesting and satisfying soldier. Revel in being the hard-bitten Sergeant O'Rourke who has to find a way to carry out his LT's latest impossible order. Or be the goldbricking Private Malarkey from Brooklyn who's the first to crack a wiseass joke and the last to leave his buddies under fire. Some of the most memorable soldiers in fiction and film are the ones who weren't in command. RPGs are not tactical war games like *Axis and Allies*, even though your campaign might be set in WWII; being *roleplaying* games, they focus not on battalions and strategic maneuver but on individual people and personal decisions. Camaraderie and heroism are the important distinctions, not stripes on a sleeve or bars on a lapel.

Know when to lead. The army differentiates between hasty and deliberate operations; so can gaming groups. In deliberate operations, commanders have detailed information about the mission and enemy, and have time to prepare and coordinate plans. Hasty operations involve decisions based on limited information and time, using only the resources that are immediately available.

In game terms, deliberate operations are often the mission handed down by the GM. Military campaigns are the easiest sort for leading PCs to the adventure the GM has planned: the party's NPC commanding officer simply hands out orders and the characters carry them out.

When time permits deliberate operations, players can resume their normal democratic interactions and put their heads

together, devising a plan of action approved by everyone. If there are conflicting ideas, the leader might have the final say but generally acts as a moderator rather than a dictator.

When the 88s start blasting and the group is committed to hasty operations, however, commanders should step up to the plate and lead. In a chaotic environment like combat, a leader provides direction and organization, uniting everyone as a cohesive unit in order to complete the mission. A commander shouldn't "micro-manage" the other characters, but should implement a definite plan and focus their attentions and energies to see it through.

Know when to follow. Think what combat would be like for your character: the noise and smoke, the confusion, the carnage. Soldiers depend on leaders in combat . . . someone who can look at the big picture and know what needs to be done. Combat is deadly, and it takes courage to commit to a dangerous action decided upon by someone else, especially if you don't agree with it. The decision to follow an order that risks personal injury or death is the defining moment of the professional soldier. If the leader is wrong or the dice are unkind, the character may die, but if the order turns out to be the right one, you'll start to build a bond of trust with the commander and the gamer across the table. Few moments in roleplaying are better.

So, muster your troops and put on the mantle of command. Someone's got to lead the charge down the cannon's mouth, and if you lead your gaming group the right way you won't be out there by yourself.

Further Reading

The best source of further reading on leadership comes from the US Army itself. The following Field Manuals might be of interest to the aspiring commander:

- *FM22-100 Army Leadership*. A must-read for leaders of any level, offering a wealth of principles, techniques, and practical examples of leadership in action.
- *FM101-5 Staff Organization And Operation*. Of specific interest are the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP in Army parlance) and the format for issuing orders.
- *FM 3-90 Tactics*. Learn principles that will help you outthink and overwhelm the GM's forces.
- *FM21-75 Combat Skills Of The Soldier*. Every player should be familiar with the concepts and principles presented here; they represent what every soldier would know as they are shipped out of basic training.

All of these manuals can be accessed online at the following URL: <http://155.217.58.58/cgi-bin/atdl.dll?type=fm>

Cold Fury

New Options for Berserk in *GURPS*

by Dmitri Scull

The standard *GURPS* Berserk rules assume that the Berserk character enters into a state of frothing (sometimes literally) madness; that one becomes an uncontrolled attacker who is so consumed by rage that one has no control over his or her choice of targets.

This is not always the case; some berserkers (often known as "controlled" or "cold" berserkers) enter into a different sort of frenzy, one more akin to a combat trance, although its results are no less dramatic. Rather than entering into a state of rage and madness, the cold berserker enters an almost calm state of extreme focus -- except that the focus is on bringing down the berserker's enemies, as fast as possible. Rather than a flurry of blows, the cold berserker goes for killing shots -- constantly, and even if the situation demands otherwise.

Additionally, many berserkers suffer from memory loss; they do not remember their actions while berserk (which can be additionally problematic). Such memories often become lost in a haze, where the subject's memories fade into a blur of color (often red or black, colors associated with violence) for the duration of the frenzy.

Cold Berserk

-15 points

The character tends to lose control in battle; unlike a normal Berserk, this is not normally keyed to temper, and the Cold Berserk can still take the Bad Temper disadvantage (but may not take the normal Berserk disadvantage). The Bloodlust disadvantage *may* still be taken with Cold Berserk, but is only worth -5 points.

Any time the character takes more than three hits in one turn; any time the character is wounded in battle before being able to wound his opponent; or any time the character is either facing tremendous odds or is protecting a friend or loved one, the character must roll vs. Will; a failed roll means the character enters a cold berserk state. "Normal" forms of extreme stress are unlikely to trigger a cold berserk, however, unless they could be mistaken for a physical attack. A cold berserker may deliberately enter the berserk state by taking the "Concentrate" maneuver and making a successful Will roll.

While in the cold berserk state, the character must make either a Step and Attack or an All-Out Attack each turn a foe is in range (unless otherwise making an attack, such as with a spell), or Move towards a foe if none are in range. The character can freely attack with ranged weapons, martial arts maneuvers, and even spells or psionics if they can be used within a single turn. However, the character must use either the most convenient attack possible, or the deadliest attack possible, and if the attack can target a specific area, the character must do so -- generally aiming for the brain, eyes, or vital organs (or heart, kidneys, or similar targets, if specific rules are used for attacking them). The character may still not take time to aim (using the Aim maneuver, as opposed to targeting specific areas). A high-tech cold berserk will reload (even without Fast-Draw) unless a deadlier or more efficient weapon is available.

As in a normal berserk state, the cold berserker cannot be stunned, and injuries cause no penalty to the character's Move score or attack rolls. All rolls to remain conscious or alive are made at a +4 bonus to HT; if the character doesn't fail any rolls, he or she will remain alive (and emotionlessly attacking) until HT reaches $(-5 \times HT)$, at which point the character will die.

As long as foes remain alive, the cold berserker will not snap out of the berserk state. If faced with a friend (either attempting to restrain the character or interceding for an enemy), the character gets a Will roll to snap out early. The character will not attack friends, unless it was a friend that accidentally triggered the frenzy (in a sparring match, for

example). If prevented from reaching a living enemy, the berserker will attack inanimate objects until the frenzy ends (getting a Will roll each time an inanimate object is destroyed or every third turn of attacking the same inanimate object, unless the enemy becomes available again before the berserk state is over). If a friend accidentally caused the frenzy, the berserker gains a Will roll each turn to snap out of it.

The berserker will pursue enemies, but will come out of the trance if three turns expire with no enemy in sight.

When the berserker comes out of the cold berserk, all the character's wounds immediately affect him or her; roll at normal HT to see if the character remains conscious or alive.

Memory Loss

-5 points

The character suffers from periods of memory loss, when he or she does not recall any actions taken. This is coupled with another disadvantage . . . almost always either Alcoholism, Berserk, or the Cold Berserk disadvantage above (although Kleptomania and Split Personality are also candidates). Whenever the character suffers from the disadvantage this is tied to, the character forgets his or her actions while succumbing to the character flaw. In the case of Berserk or Cold Berserk, the character forgets what happened while in a frenzied state; in the case of Alcoholism or Addiction, the character forgets what happened while "bingeing." For Kleptomania, the character immediately forgets any thefts, and if the character has a Split Personality, the personalities (even if merely differing facets of the same individual) do not share memories.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Roll Die, Say 'Hi', Decide

A couple of weeks ago I commented on making climactic moments exciting, mentioning that I wasn't planning on writing about it, but would if there was any demand. Well, I was precisely and mathematically whelmed by the response, being neither overwhelmed by the response nor underwhelmed by the staggering silence. So I'll be working on that column shortly.

But in the interim, I had something of a mini-epiphany as I was contemplating this other column. It deals with the core of player actions, choices, and options in roleplaying games . . . once I mulled it over, I found myself struggling to make sure that most any logical action could be so broken down into my latest nutter theory. And, after a dazzling five minutes of thought and a half-can of Pringles brand potato crisps, I have concluded that they can.

Anyway, every player action in an RPG can be broken down into three possible actions: rolling dice, making choices, and talking to folks.

(I should note that this is similar to -- but different from -- my friend Dennis' theory of "fighting things, going places, doing stuff." Dennis is a wise man, years ahead of his time. And he plays an evil mastermind better than anyone else I know . . . but I digress.)

"Rolling dice" means any randomly determined resolution; whether rolling to see if you hit the Half-Celestial Ghost Lycanthropic Bulette, checking to disarm the trap, or making your "Am I drunk yet?" roll, they are all elements of the story that are otherwise unknown to both the GM and the players.

"Making choices" refers to any kind of active decision (mostly) devoid of GM input; deciding on the left corridor over the right, picking out a costume to wear to the grand ball, or making the decision to enter combat (and let dice to the talking) are all choices the players make.

"Talking to folks" refers to interacting with characters, either non-player or the rest of the party. The most common interactions seem to be PC/NPC, although inter-party relations are usually more enduring in a campaign.

(Yes, I know there are diceless games . . . but I also know that such systems almost always have *some* deterministic method; those rare games that leave everything to GM fiat probably find those actions reclassified to "making decisions.")

Okay; we've got three broad classifications that actions will fall under. What does all this have to do with the price of popcorn in Pekalongan?

Well, my current working theory is that most good games -- or at least, most traditional good games -- have a mixture of all three elements. Admittedly, this isn't exactly an earth-shattering revelation unto itself; I'm sure people know (on some level) that a gaming session has lots of different stuff going on, and three hours of nothing but "Knowledge (Honey-Baked Ham)" skill checks is probably going to be a tad monotonous.

But what isn't as immediately obvious is that this ratio is likely to be different for different players. One player make take incredible delight in using the Open-Hand Pudding-Femur Technique feat on an enemy (rolling dice); another may like trying to convince the NPC police officer that it *isn't* unusual for humdrum joggers to carry oxyacetylene torches and IR goggles (talking to folks); still another may like trying to ponder exactly *how* the party is going to break into the auction museum to switch out the *Tome of Veal Darkness* with a 1936 Cleveland telephone directory (making decisions).

And, of course, players will have different approaches to the same problem. In our auction example, some folks may want to kick down the door with guns-a-blazin' or make their Hide in Knickknacks roll (dice), some may try to trick the auctioneer into giving the book to them (talking), while others would rather come up with a fool-proof plan that doesn't require any dice roll (decisions).

Finally, many actions will be a combination of these elements; the most common is adding dice to the other elements, either after ("roll to see if your Intimidation attempt works") or before ("roll to see if you can spot any weaknesses in the house's defenses [which will influence your decisions]"). But any mix is possible; talking to an NPC may let the players come up with a plan, the plan may consist of talking with an NPC, or the plan may consist of one hero talking with an NPC as a distraction while another uses his 12-die Überskill to get stuff done.

Okay; so far, so good. Now, let's keep looking at our triad here.

First, I now recognize that players and GMs need to be on at least a similar wavelength as to what situations will be covered by what action possibilities. Otherwise, there may be [problems](#). For example, the GM may expect a player to just roll his Knavery skill in a situation where the player was hoping to just roleplay his chicanery. Or the GM may allow the Hide in Shadows attempt to succeed automatically, when the player really *wants* to roll those dice and see how phenomenally well he did. Again, communication as to what kind of game everyone would have fun with is paramount; although it's just as possible to have fun with a diceless *How to Host a Mystery*-style game as it is with a roll-heavy dungeon crawl, the experiences will be vastly different . . . and participants expecting one over the other may well be disappointed.

Second, the triad represents a (rough) balance as to where the control of the game rests. Figuring stuff out puts the power mostly into the player's hands (since the GM can't force the players to think -- or not think -- a certain way . . . although, obviously, he is in control as to the *results* of those actions). Talking with NPCs places most of the power in the GM's hands; ultimately, he can control the pace, flow, and resolution of that conversation. ("Good day, m'lord." "No one insults me in such a way! Toss them in the dungeon!") Of course, interactions between PCs are beyond the GM's control. Rolling dice is (for the most part) neutral, removing control from either side and placing it with a third party "arbiter." (Yes, the GM can control this to a certain extent; that +874 difficulty modifier to the "Make the Zombie Laugh" roll *may* make things more difficult . . . but, ultimately, the control is placed in the hands of the dice. And, if a die roll was permitted, woe befall the GM who *doesn't* allow that phenomenal critical success to have at least *some* effect.)

Let's look at this idea a bit closer. We'll start with the stated goal of having a roughly "neutral" game . . . in other words, no one side is more "empowered" than the other. Now, looking at our trinity, there are two obvious solutions . . . both of which are radically different. The first is to make a dice-heavy game, where most actions will be resolved through random determination; that way, no one side can claim power. The second is to make a dice-light game, where the thrust of the game revolves around the players' decisions, and their interactions with others (the power one side wields is tempered by the other side's control). Although these two games will ideally be similar in power interactions (neither the players will run slipshod over the virtual reality, nor will the GM squish the players like bugs), they will be *radically* different. In fact, these two hypothetical games may well describe in a nutshell the dichotomy between two popular styles: the *d20 System*-type tactical dungeon crawl and the White Wolf Storyteller system-esque "intrigues, decisions, and repercussions." Neither style is "right," but rather they both strive to maintain a balance of control . . . albeit in vastly different ways (which is why the two camps often clash).

Third, I'm coming to realize that -- as an idealized goal -- I (as a GM) try to ensure that there are at least two of the three possibilities available to any problem I present my players. I believe that if, say, the *only* way I've crafted for the heroes to get the Level 2 Keycard is by killing the boss at the end of Level 1, my players will probably sense the lack of freedom I've presented and become frustrated or bored. (Of course, this skirts the issue that often I have *no clue* how a given situation will be resolved . . . but that's another column.) Of course, I may have a probable resolution in mind ("They're totally gonna whack these henchmen!"), but if the players would rather try talking with them or outsmart them entirely, I won't punish them.

Roleplaying games are often praised by the freedom they allow their participants; the players get an entire world to explore, and it seems like they can do anything. Yet, by breaking down nearly all interactions into one of three possibilities -- and understanding the implications of emphasizing one corner of the triangle over the others -- it may become possible to make the game more fun for everyone.

Or this whole column could be a hallucinatory extension resulting from my recent Pringles-binges.

* * *

Last week's answer: *The Rod of Seven Parts* (for *Dungeons & Dragons*), p. 3.

(*Four stars*) "You are the monster, hiding . . . in the guise of a wizard. You don't care about any politics -- countries or alliances. All you want to do is rampage through the countryside, having a good old monster time. If you rampage, you do not devour yourself."

TransToony Space

by David Morgan-Mar

It is the year 2100^{3/4}. Cartoon characters face their greatest challenges yet: settling the far reaches of Near Space, dealing with weird new gadgets that one or two people are actually *afraid* to use, and understanding bizarre TransToony cultures!

(Note: Page references are to the Deluxe Edition of *Toon*, 1991. The same references might be to different pages in earlier editions, or to *Toon Silly Stuff* or *Toon Strikes Again*. If you have these versions, you probably know where to find the material.)

Locations

TransToony adventures can take place virtually anywhere, although The City and Outer Space are popular locations.

The City

Millions of people live in The City, only some of them are not people -- there are robots, cybertoasters, and biotoasters as well (see below). Players can be any one of these strange characters. Otherwise The City is pretty much like any other hyper-evolved futuristic urban mega-complex. There are enormous buildings with crystalline diamond windows, flying cars, and glass tubes you can stand under and get sucked through to any desired destination in The City. These almost never malfunction. Mostly. Well, hardly ever.

Elaundry

Elaundry is an underwater city in the ocean, built by Australians. Most of the inhabitants are platypuses, or platypus biotoasters, though there is the occasional crocodile. Inhabitants of Elaundry explore the bottom of the sea, raise fish in underwater farms (complete with barns, tractors, and wind . . . er, current-mills), and do lots and lots of laundry. With so much water handy, everyone in the world sends their dirty clothes to Elaundry for cleaning.

Outer Space

Outer Space is far from empty. Besides planets and moons (described below), there are lots of space stations, asteroids, and other strange things flying around. Space Station Zero (*Toon* p. 191) might be out there somewhere, as well as many others, all unique in their own ways.

Characters in Outer Space will be *weightless*, which means they float around and bump into things a lot, until the Animator thinks it would be funnier to have them *fall* into things. A character must make a Zip roll or become *Space Sick* when entering weightlessness -- this means they are Boggled. Characters who go out into the vacuum of space without a space suit take a die of damage per Action until they Fall Down -- unless they fail a Smarts roll and don't realize they can't breathe.

Elvis-5

This is a big space station, inhabited entirely by clones of Elvis. It spins (and sometimes shimmies and shakes) to provide gravity inside. The interior is just like a big town, complete with the Viva Las Vegas casino, the Blue Suede Shoe Shop, a Jailhouse, and a hotel called . . . you guessed it. The inhabitants *really* hate visitors making Elvis puns. Sometimes the artificial gravity fails and the place becomes all shook up . . .

1124345954362 Shibboleth

Shibboleth is an asteroid which has been converted into a space station. (The number in front of the name is the area code for dialling it long distance.) The station is crammed with TransToony scientists who are studying something buried inside the asteroid: a Prime-Ministerial Black Mole. Black Moles burrow their way through the universe, leaving mole-holes behind them, which spaceships can sometimes use to travel at Incredible Speed. A *Prime-Ministerial* Black Mole orders the other Black Moles around, which means he's pretty influential and powerful. The scientists are trying to harness this power for the good of TransToon-kind.

The Moon

There are several colonies on the moon. Their main business is mining and exporting green cheese back to Earth, where gourmets just love the stuff. Moon habitats are sealed with their own air supplies, to keep the awful green cheese smell out. Excursions on the surface have to be made in space suits. Any character exposed to green cheese smell is instantly Boggled!

Mars

Mars is of course the home of Martians, and they don't like the colonies that Earthlings have established there. Most Martians are like the ones described in *Toon* (pp. 70, 193). They just love making Earthlings Fall Down, which makes Mars a dangerous frontier world. What character could possibly resist going there?

Prune

The desert planet Prune (*Toon*, p. 113) is far too dangerous to colonize because of the monstrosly hungry dessertworms and the endless complaining of the wrinkly inhabitants about the lack of ice cream. The moons of Prune, however, form great bases for exploration. Prune has two moons: Pitted and Stewed. Pitted is a giant prune pit, heavily cratered, while Stewed is a smaller version of Prune itself, but covered in steaming hot swamps of prune juice rather than sand. There are rumors of strange life-forms in the swamps of Stewed, but the colonies there haven't been attacked . . . yet!

Eclair

The dessert planet Eclair (*Toon*, p. 114) is a much more hospitable place than Prune, covered in ice cream, candy, and pastries. In fact the biggest danger here is becoming immensely overweight. There are several TransToony colonies here. The main business is exporting dessert products.

Venus

Venus is a hot steamy planet, covered with swamps and dinosaurs. The dinosaurs are just big, dumb animals, although they are notoriously hard to catch. Plenty of people, from eccentric collectors to TransToony scientists looking for new bio-products, want to get their hands on one. A group of player characters might just take on the job.

Organizations

ToonTech Specifica

This huge company specializes in inventing and producing TransToony technology. They are always developing new and weirder cybertoaster models, as well as pushing the limits of strangeness on biotoasters. ToonTech Specifica built the Elaundry underwater city, and also produce spaceships and other gadgets needed for Outer Space exploration. They operate a delivery service which will supply mail orders from anywhere in TransToony Space.

Rat Aeroforces of the Toonited States (RATS)

The Toonited States of America patrols Outer Space, keeping law and order. They use specially modified rat troops, all having the Space Adaptation shtick at level 8 or higher. These elite forces are known as RATS. A typical RATS squad contains 10 rat troopers armed with Lesterdel Ray-guns, led by a grizzled rat the others refer to as "Sarge." They zip around space in a *Sudsy*-class spaceship.

Eatyer-Cabbage

This company produces vast quantities of cabbage-based foodstuffs for the enormous TransToony population. Because there are far too many people to feed with normal farms, Eatyer-Cabbage grows genetically modified cabbage protein in huge, smelly food-vats. Sometimes they run tours of their factories. You sure wouldn't want to fall into one of those food-vats . . .

BAKORSTABBERS

This is a spy agency which organizes undercover operations throughout TransToony Space. BAKORSTABBERS agents usually wear trench coats and dark sunglasses. They spy on people, steal gadgets, leave bombs and nanavirus peels lying around, and generally behave in a shifty manner. Any smart group of characters should always be careful in case they are being followed by a BAKORSTABBERS agent. But have you ever seen a smart group of characters?

Gadgets

In addition to almost anything from the *Toon Ace Catalog*, the following gadgets and technology are freely available.

Body Modifications

Genetically engineered *body mods* are common. Animators can use any of the implants (treated as body mods rather than cybergear) from pp. 189-190 of the *Tooniversal Tour Guide*, or just make up anything else and it will probably be available! Characters should be allowed to start with any body mods they like, though if a mod logically (or illogically) allows use of a Shtick, the character must still pay points for it. Body mods can also be added during play, either by mad surgery (Set/Disarm Traps roll, or perhaps Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods!) or by nanaviruses.

Nanaviruses

These are specially engineered bananas which, when eaten, rearrange the molecules of a character's body! Properly designed nanaviruses can add cool new body mods, or do things like turn humans into cats. Badly designed ones can turn characters into *anything* -- roll on the TransToony Silly Species Table below, or almost any table from pp. 200-205 of *Toon*, or just make something up. Some nanaviruses are especially potent, affecting anyone who slips on one of the peels (which never happens in a cartoon, right?).

Virtual In-Yer-Face Devices

Most TransToony characters have these gadgets, either integrated into fashion accessories like cool sunglasses, or implanted right in their brains. These allow characters to see things displayed over their field of vision, like maps of where they are, the menu of the nearest restaurant, or daytime TV. Normally, a Virtual In-Yer-Face is controlled by the character possessing it. Sometimes (like whenever the Animator thinks it would be funny), they malfunction, blotting out reality completely with re-runs of old sitcoms, or worse! A character whose Virtual In-Yer-Face malfunctions will be helpless, exactly as if Boggled. There are rumors that some gadgets allow people to take over control of others' Virtual In-Yer-Faces . . .

Clones

Any character can be cloned, virtually instantly, creating a copy exactly like the original! This is a simple process, involving a cell sample being taken, cultured, grown in a tank, etc, etc . . . or just zapping the subject with one of those newfangled Clone Guns. Clones are usually controlled by the Animator, and will often do their best to make the original character Fall Down and then claim that *they* are the original. If it would be funnier, the Animator may allow a player to control multiple copies of his character.

Toasts

By a radical and dangerous process, cartoon characters can have their brains converted into a piece of toast! This makes the old body Fall Down *permanently*. The "Toast" has all the memories and abilities of the character, but no way to speak or do anything, unless loaded into a cybertoaster or biotoaster. Toasts can be copied, or *yoxed*, meaning several copies of the one character can be running around in separate toaster bodies. What fun!

Cybertoasters

These are high-tech toasters with the ability to see and speak, but no Smarts of their own. If the Toast of a cartoon character is placed in one of the toast slots, the character can use the cybertoaster as a new body! Some cybertoasters have arms and legs, but this is not always the case. Some are built right into vehicles or even spaceships, meaning the Toast can control the vehicle just by thinking about it (and making a Drive Vehicle roll). If a cybertoaster character is Boggled or Falls Down, he must make a Zip roll to avoid the Toast being ejected from the slot. Sympathetic characters might reload the Toast, otherwise the Animator should arrange some cartoony coincidence which results in the Toast being put into a toaster (not necessarily the same one it came from!). Some cybertoasters are especially ornery, granting extra Hit Points and Fight skill.

Biotoasters

Even more strange, TransToony technology allows toast slots to be placed in *other cartoon characters*. A Toast loaded into such a "biotoaster" can talk to that character directly via a toonypathic link. This means the Toast can make Fast Talk attempts on that character. If the Toast wants more control, it can attempt a Smarts roll to take over the biotoaster completely, but a failed attempt will leave the Toast Boggled. The biotoaster resumes control of its body whenever the Toast is Boggled or Falls Down.

Artificial Insanities (AIs)

An AI is a computer program with a personality and skills just like a character! They are printed on to things like crumpets or English muffins, so they can fit into toast slots, just like a Toast. AIs tend to be either snivelling and paranoid ("I'm just a computer program. Don't eat me!") or insufferably smug and superior ("I'm vastly smarter than any organic being. Out of my way, meat-head!"). If eaten, an AI lodges inside a character's stomach and can talk to the character just as if he was a biotoaster.

Lesterdel Ray-Guns

These are the latest and hottest ray-guns from ToonTech Specifica. They do a massive 2 dice of damage on a successful hit, and can be fired safely in Outer Space or even underwater. They can be plugged in to a Virtual In-Yer-Face to give targeting information which adds +1 to the user's Fire Gun skill. Unfortunately, Lesterdel ray-guns all have pushy AIs loaded into their toast slots, which criticize the character's shooting and try to take over any Virtual In-Yer-Face they are plugged into.

Sudsy-Class Spaceships

These are your typical spaceships, able to carry any convenient number of passengers and cargo to just about anywhere in Near Space. They are armed with forward mounted twin soapy-water-cannons, which fire thick streams of sudsy water at enemies. These do no damage, but Boggle anyone hit with them, or on board a ship hit with them. Additionally, hit targets end up really clean. Creative characters might be able to adapt the cannons to squirt other stuff, like shaving cream, or warm prune juice from Stewed (eww!).

New Shtick

Space Adaptation (3 points)

You never get Space Sick! Additionally, if you make your shtick roll you can operate in vacuum without needing to breathe, and can ignore weightlessness and walk normally on any surface while everyone else floats around. Any tricky action you attempt in space can be rolled against this shtick instead of the relevant skill, if you wish.

Characters

Chimps Mackintosh

Description: Chimps Mackintosh is four chimpanzees, the original plus three clones. Mostly they cooperate, but if asked who the original is they will disagree violently and fight one another. Mackintosh is the editor of *TransToony Consumer Rag*, a Virtual In-Yer-Face magazine which publishes the latest developments in TransToony technology. They will try any new gadgets they can get their hands on.

Beliefs and Goals: TransToony stuff rocks! Research it all -- even try it out -- then publish it. Another clone of me would go nicely. *I'm* the original Chimps Mackintosh, these other ones are the clones!

Hit Points: 7 (each)

Speed: 3

Muscle: 4

Break Down Door: 4

Climb: 10

Fight: 7

Pick Up Heavy Thing: 4

Throw: 8

Zip: 2

Dodge: 5

Drive Vehicle: 5

Fire Gun: 8

Jump: 9

Ride: 2

Run: 6

Swim: 2

Smarts: 5

Hide/Spot Hidden: 5

Identify Dangerous Thing: 8

Read: 10

Resist Fast-Talk: 5

See/Hear/Smell: 7

Set/Disarm Trap: 5

Track/Cover Tracks: 5

Chutzpah: 4

Fast-Talk: 8

Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 8

Sleight of Hand: 4

Sneak: 6

Shticks:

Detect TransToony Technology: 7

Toasten Radishmacher

Description: Radishmacher was a six foot tall humanoid radish until a horrible accident in a ToonTech Specifica food factory caused him to be sliced into a salad. His friends quickly converted him into a Toast and placed him in a robot cybertoaaster body. Now, he leads a gang of crooks determined to eliminate all TransToony technology. His plan to smash a cream pie asteroid into Mars, Boggling *everyone* on the planet, was foiled by a group of RATS operatives. Radishmacher fled to a Secret Hideout somewhere on one of the moons of Prune, where he secretly plots more mayhem and destruction.

Beliefs and Goals: TransToony technology is evil! Destroy it all! Ignore the fact this means I wouldn't have a body any more. Curse that Space Patrol! Switch cybertoaasters often so nobody knows who I am. Avoid radish salads.

Hit Points: 11

Speed: 5

Muscle: 7

Break Down Door: 7

Climb: 7

Fight: 9

Pick Up Heavy Thing: 8

Throw: 7

Zip: 4

Dodge: 6

Drive Vehicle: 8

Fire Gun: 7

Jump: 4

Ride: 4

Run: 4

Swim: N/A

Smarts: 8

Hide/Spot Hidden: 8

Identify Dangerous Thing: 10

Read: 8

Resist Fast-Talk: 10

See/Hear/Smell: 8

Set/Disarm Trap: 10

Track/Cover Tracks: 8

Chutzpah: 6

Fast-Talk: 9

Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 6

Sleight of Hand: 6
Sneak: 6

Shticks:

Hypnosis: 8

Pumpnickel Jones

Description: Pumpnickel Jones is human-sized loaf of pumpnickel bread, with arms, legs, and a head. He carries a notepad and a camera, and wears a jaunty hat with a card with the word "PRESS" printed on it stuck in the hatband. He is the ace reporter for *Lazy System*, which publishes travel guides and, at Jones' insistence, news. He used to be human, but ate a particularly strange nanavirus once when in the field chasing a story.

Beliefs and Goals: Get the story at all costs! News-men can go anywhere and do anything, no matter what anyone else says. You can't hurt me -- see this "PRESS" card in my hat? Don't trust nanaviruses.

Hit Points: 7

Speed: 6

Muscle: 3

Break Down Door: 3
Climb: 3
Fight: 5
Pick Up Heavy Thing: 6
Throw: 6

Zip: 3

Dodge: 9
Drive Vehicle: 7
Fire Gun: 6
Jump: 3
Ride: 3
Run: 3
Swim: 3

Smarts: 5

Hide/Spot Hidden: 5
Identify Dangerous Thing: 5
Read: 10
Resist Fast-Talk: 7
See/Hear/Smell: 10
Set/Disarm Trap: 5
Track/Cover Tracks: 10

Chutzpah: 8

Fast-Talk: 10
Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 8
Sleight of Hand: 10
Sneak: 10

Shticks:

Incredible Luck: 9

TransToony Silly Species Table

- Roll** Whatizit?
- 11 Human (a plain human is weird in this setting!)
 - 12 Human with AI in stomach
 - 13 Human biotoaster
 - 14 Human, 12' tall and really, really skinny
 - 15 Human with green skin and gills
 - 16 Human with wings and a beaked nose
 - 21 Rabbit with AI in stomach
 - 22 Dog biotoaster
 - 23 Intelligent cuttlefish
 - 24 Dolphin with legs and an attitude
 - 25 Spaceship controlled by an AI
 - 26 Mutant bagel AI with arms and legs
 - 31 Gorilla with snakes for arms
 - 32 Three-headed rat
 - 33 Wedge of green moon cheese
 - 34 Toast in a walking vending machine cybertoaster
 - 35 Native of Prune (purple and wrinkly)
 - 36 Clone of Elvis
 - 41 Toast of Elvis in Elvis robot cybertoaster
 - 42 Toast of Elvis in Hitler clone biotoaster
 - 43 Top half of a lion with bottom half of a fish
 - 44 Electric sheep
 - 45 Clockwork squid
 - 46 Running shoe
 - 51 Penguin/crocodile hybrid
 - 52 Vacuum cleaner/cow hybrid
 - 53 Traffic light/clam/cactus hybrid
 - 54 Albatross with steel armor plating
 - 55 Nearsighted mole with Lesterdel Ray-gun implant in nose
 - 56 Palm tree with robotic arms and legs
 - 61 Black forest cake AI
 - 62 Intelligent nanavirus
 - 63 Yox of a dog in a cat biotoaster
 - 64 Yoxes of Bud Abbot and Lou Costello, in one robot cybertoaster
 - 65 Seven Yoxes of Napoleon, in different toaster bodies
 - 66 Yox of Toast of Clone of Julius Caesar

Adventure Ideas

"No, *you* load him in."

The player characters are a groups of RATS patrollers, hot on the trail of Toasten Radishmacher. When they catch up

with him, they capture his Toast in a huge fight scene. Now all they need to do is interrogate him. Unfortunately, the only way to do that is load him into a cybertoaster, and the only one left in working order is a monstrous robot with 30 Hit Points and a Fight skill of 11!

Orbital Defray

The characters are investigators for ToonTech Specifica, exploring a space station where the company has been doing some illegal research into nanaviruses. Something on board seems to keep making the scientists Fall Down . . . The characters need to work out what is happening and produce a report so ToonTech Specifica can write the whole thing off as a tax loss. When things start getting out of hand, a RATS patrol shows up and wants to know what's going on -- they will need to be silenced!

"I've heard this one before."

Someone is kidnapping famous comedians and making illegal yoxes of them to sell on the black market. The players' characters are investigators looking to find out who is behind the evil scheme and put a stop to it. Their best lead is checking out a comedy club, where various cybertoasters keep telling the same bad jokes again and again and again . . .

"Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale . . ."

The characters' spaceship crashes and they are stranded on an asteroid. Thankfully, they've salvaged a crate full of weird TransToony gadgets, one of which might just be able to get them off this rock. They just have to try them all until they find one that does something useful.

The Top Brassica

The characters are employees of Eatyer-Cabbage, running one of the boring publicity tours they hold every so often. This time, however, the tour group includes Chimps Mackintosh and Pumpnickel Jones. Mackintosh is looking for cool new food products and will try everything from the plain cabbage protein to the highly experimental and dangerous new cabbagenic viruses. Jones will be looking for a scoop -- if he reports on the cabbagenic viruses it could ruin the company!

* * *

(Thanks to Pookie for naming the moons of Prune, and Ral for BAKORSTABBERS.)

Designer's Notes: [Transhuman Space Personnel Files](#)

Presenting Options

by Phil Masters

The idea with *Personnel Files* is to help display choices. As it says in the book's introduction, *Transhuman Space* is a big, complicated setting, and creating PCs for it may seem a little bit like work to the newcomer. Hence, this is a book full of pregenerated PCs; they should, I hope, not only help those complete newbies, but also spark ideas for variant characters among slightly more experienced players, and give GMs not only instant NPCs, but also concepts for campaigns and scenarios. It's also got a bunch of standard AIs for use as "Programmed Allies," which should simplify the creation of well-rounded, properly equipped characters in another way. *Transhuman Space* is, after all, a setting in which such a PC can have an NPC implanted in his skull, and wear another as part of his costume.

Of course, one thing about PCs and a lot of NPCs is that they hunt in packs. Hence, I organized these ready-made characters into teams of three or four, of equal point values, with, I hope, interestingly complementary skills and personalities. Indeed, much of the initial planning stage of the process consisted of coming up with such teams -- which are, by the nature of things, themselves ideas for campaigns. Some were easy, and indeed fell out of earlier projects and books; as I created and detailed the "Vacuum Cleaners" for *High Frontier*, it was only natural for me to include a freelance Cleaner crew here. Others were essentially standard RPG campaign ideas; some people want to play tactical games with "combat specialist" characters, which in this setting translated to a mercenary squad working for Executive Decisions Incorporated. Still, I wanted and found room to be a little offbeat, too, from the business consultancy in Cape Town which is run by a 105-year-old woman and which doubles as a detective agency, to the trio of highly transhumanist 500 point infomorph/cybershell characters with their peculiar secrets and concerns.

But this book had a fixed length, and although that went from 32 to 48 pages in the course of early discussions, I could only include a fixed number of characters. This meant that there were a couple of ideas which I toyed with at one stage or another, but then rejected. As these *are*, I hope, nonetheless moderately interesting PC, NPC, or campaign concepts, I'll mention them here, for readers to adopt and adapt as they choose.

A Man. And His Dog. And Their Friends.

I came up with this idea as an answer to two questions. First, is it possible to have interesting, playable, adventurous 50 point PCs in the world of *Transhuman Space*? And second, given the peculiarities of the setting -- how many playable PCs can you fit into what looks like a single character picture?

Here's the back story. Joe M'Duro was born and brought up in a remote rural village in Africa. (Exactly where is left open -- Tanganyika or Uganda would be plausible.) His life changed when a South African named Steve Hollick, a very wealthy man by Joe's standards, bought land locally and built a house. It turned out that Hollick wanted someone to act as a security guard, and Joe -- bright, quite tough, and recommended as honest by his schoolteachers -- got the job. He was very pleased, even when it turned out that his duty was mainly to act as a partner to "Rolphie," an uplifted dog which Steve brought with him. Joe got on well with Rolphie, Hollick, and the AIs he also had to work with, although he never did really learn what Hollick was doing in the house. It was clear that the South African was a computer expert, but he didn't talk about his work.

But it did turn out that he was right to recruit security; his mistake was failing to recruit enough. *Someone* attacked the place out of the blue, in the middle of the night, and their first missile destroyed the guardhouse where Joe and Rolphie were on duty. Only sheer luck let the pair survive. When they recovered enough to crawl out from under the rubble a few minutes later, they found the main house obliterated and Steve Hollick dead.

However, Joe had a second stroke of luck, recovering a working (and powerful) DVI rig from the ruins, and locating

one house system which could be briefly rebooted on battery power. "Gellert," the AI in Rolphie's implant, was able to talk Joe through the task of downloading APHRA-3, one of Hollick's personal AIs, into the wearable system. Now, he and his new friends are out for justice. Where this will take them, and how much trouble they're getting into, is up to the GM.

So there are, in fact, four characters here:

Joe M'Duro has a ST 11, DX 12, IQ 11, and HT 12. He has Struggling Wealth level (-10 points), a Sense of Duty to family and close friends (-5 points), an Obsession with identifying the people who killed Hollick and bringing them to some kind of justice (-10 points), and a couple of Quirks. This leaves him with around 17 points to buy skills such as Stealth, Beam Weapons (Electrolaser), Agronomy, Survival, Naturalist, and perhaps a very little Electronics Operation, and maybe one or two very minor Contacts or a Claim to Hospitality. He also has the electrolaser rifle and light armor which came with his old job.

Rolphie is an exceptionally large (and smart) K-10A Postcanine (p.TS118), with ST 12, DX 14, IQ 8, and HT 13. He's functionally Dead Broke, and with his racial package and a couple of quirks, he can afford 28 points in skills, including Brawling (i.e. close combat), Tracking, and Stealth, and a bit of Acting which lets him pass as a normal dog. His "racial" Sense of Duty is now focused on Joe as his "master."

Gellert is a full SAI-7; Rolphie is a *big* dog, and Hollick evidently found someone who managed to fit a Distributed VII with a sufficiently powerful computer in his body. (This *may* be a clue as to the sort of research which Hollick was pursuing.) However, it doesn't have known backup anywhere, so it lacks the standard Extra Life; on the other hand, its Reprogrammable Duty takes the "No Master" limitation, because its control codes are lost (so far as anyone knows -- of course, for this to be a valid disadvantage, the GM must be entitled to assume that they're on file *somewhere*). With a -5 point Sense of Duty to its close associates, a -10 point Secret (SAIs don't have citizenship in this part of the world, and it really shouldn't be running around loose), and a couple of Quirks, it can afford 11 points in skills. Its original function was to help train Rolphie and then to provide him with a communications link to human beings and security systems, so appropriate options would include Teaching, Electronics Operation (Communications), and Diplomacy.

APHRA-3 (Automated Personal Heuristic Robotic Aide) is another SAI-7, running on a distributed virtual interface which Joe now wears. Like Gellert, it has "No Master" for its Reprogrammable Duty, and no Extra Life. As one of Hollick's personal research assistants, it actually has some idea what he was doing -- but for some reason, it isn't talking. On the other hand, it seems just as dedicated as Joe to tracking down the cause of its creator's death. Unfortunately, it seems totally unaccustomed to life outside the laboratory, and handles some social interactions rather ineptly, while failing to recognize its own limitations. It has Overconfidence (-10 points), Mild Shyness (-5 points), an Obsession worth -10 points, a Secret (actually a whole bundle of interrelated secrets) worth -20 points, and a couple of Quirks. This leaves it with 31 points to spend on skills such as Research, Artificial Intelligence, Electronics Operation (Computers), and Computer Programming.

Barrier Reef Recalled

This second unrealized idea partly developed from a mental flashback to a fairly obscure Australian children's TV series which showed up on British television many years ago. Funnily enough, I wasn't even that big a fan, but something evidently stuck. Unfortunately, space concerns with this book aside, the whole thing is something which probably ought to wait for the upcoming *Blue Shadow*, which is still being written (by somebody else) as I'm writing this. It also really needs a complete vehicle design, and possibly a new or modified cybershell, which would have complicated things further, and the general character background might have come a little too close to the team of U.S. Marshals on Mars which I did use. Still, it ought to be viable.

The idea was to explore the possibilities for sea-going adventures in the setting by coming up with a complete (nautical) ship's crew. As these people needed to have an excuse to be wandering round a lot, the logical plan seemed to be to make them oceanographers or similar scientists; to get them into adventures, I was thinking of giving them some kind of quasi-official status or government backing. With Elandra as a possible recurring location, the recollection of that TV series swirling round my mind, and me being a sucker for the picturesque glamour of a part of

the world where I've never even been, the obvious location for their operations was the east coast of Australia, and especially the Great Barrier Reef. It's a sunny sort of area, I'm told, but those who want something dark in their scenarios could incorporate ecological threats to the Reef itself (I'm assuming that it survives to 2100, albeit probably with much human help and in a damaged and depleted state), or shady corporate dealings with GenTech Pacifica (p.TS94-5), who do look to have an almost cyberpunk manipulativeness.

So what about the ship itself, and its crew? Well, a combination of energy efficiency and sheer darn cool demands that the vessel be fitted with a full set of sails, although there's no need to make it low-tech; it can also have a state of the art hull, auxiliary engines, and enough scientific equipment to keep any techie happy. In fact, it can be run by an onboard computer, with an AI which then might as well be one of the PCs. A sailing ship which can be run by an AI is either going to need a lot of automated systems and some robot arms, or a lot of small free-roaming teleoperated cybershells, probably on the ever-popular "spider" pattern, and quite likely both, but there's plenty of ways of doing that in game terms.

As for the (more or less) human crew, which could reasonably number three -- well, we need an experienced marine scientist and competent sailor as the skipper, an Aquamorph parahuman for underwater operations and general variety, and, say, someone young and dynamic to play the "action hero" role, with practical maritime skills to assist in sailing the vessel, enough scientific knowledge not to look like an idiot when the technical stuff proves important, and probably the best physical stats and some combat skills.

I didn't take this one much beyond that, but looking at it, it could set a pattern for "specialist" teams in any environment in *Transhuman Space*, and in fact it may be close in pattern to the Vacuum Cleaner crew I did put in the book -- an AI running the vessel, a commander figure, someone genetically adapted to the specific environment, and a "competent everyman" crew member to round off the group. But then, the objective of the book was as much to spark ideas as to provide specific details -- and I hope it can do both.

Creatures Of The Night: Anamiae

A New Threat for *In Nomine*

by Christopher Anthony

In the Litany of the Hunter, passed down through generations of vampire killers and slayers of undead, there is a mention of an ancient spider goddess, and the curse she laid on a man who dared to take up the mantle of the spider without taking up her worship. It is no more than a few lines in the text, naming a group of vampires that draw their power and weakness from this goddess rather than from unholy ritual, but it is there.

(The term "round" is used throughout as a unit of time. This refers to an In Nomine combat round, which lasts five seconds.)

Most modern vampire hunters regard this as a myth, a possibility drawn from the superstitious, believing minds of medieval men.

They couldn't be more wrong.

Anamiae (*sing. Anamia*) *Spider Vampires*

To a casual viewer, Anamiae resemble mortals, to the extent that they can walk about in the day and have no immediately-visible characteristics -- aside from a slight acceleration of the growth of hair and faintly-bulging lips -- that would mark them as anything other than normal people.

However, there are several characteristics that mark Anamiae as being nonhuman. The most spectacular of these is the set of folding mandibles that are normally hidden in the mouth and are extruded when the Anamia intends to feed. These mandibles make a very characteristic mark upon the victim: a pair of punctures, two to three inches apart and connected by a straight line of reddened skin.

Upon close inspection, an observer will find that the pupils of an Anamia have changed as well. Instead of having a single pupil, each eye has four: one large pupil in the normal area, and three small pupils, their diameter spreading from the edge of the central pupil to the outer edge of the iris, spaced equidistantly around the central pupil. (This grants +1 to Perception rolls, but only for sight-based rolls. It does not negate penalties for low light or total darkness.)

The third large change to the Anamiae is their internal anatomy: most of the organs have atrophied, leaving an enlarged major digestive tract -- esophagus, stomach, and intestines -- a large, strong heart, and a pair of lungs. An Anamia's skin does not atrophy, change color, or alter in any way, shape or form once he has transformed from human to Anamia, but the bite of the Spider Vampire that turned him will never heal, always appearing as a scar: two punctures with a thin line of scar tissue running between them. (In *GURPS*, the organ atrophy is a side effect of the Anamiae's Vampiric Dependency. However, Anamiae are not eligible for Injury Tolerance: No Vitals, because the non-atrophied organs expand to fill the cavity. The scar is simply a special effect.)

Rumors aside, Anamiae have neither the power to climb walls nor to spin webs.

Those looking for the telltale signs of undead, however, may be somewhat thwarted by the fact that Anamiae are not like traditional undead in one key fashion: having not undergone one of Saminga's rituals, their souls are not bound to their bodies. In fact, the curse of the goddess draws the soul of a dead Anamia into the Marches, where -- at least when the goddess still existed -- the Anamia would live in thrall to the goddess forever. (In *GURPS*, this is the equivalent of an Extra Life, with the Limitation Only As A Dream Shade. In a *GURPS* game that does not incorporate *In Nomine* elements, substitute "ghost" for "Dream Shade." Being under the thrall of the spider goddess is an

Involuntary Duty, always active.)

Feeding

An Anamia subsists entirely on the blood of his human victims. Each pint that he drains will sustain him for a week of active life, or a month of inactivity (hibernation, which is achieved by making a successful Strength roll; another Strength roll is required to return to activity). However, any blood drained outside of his lair (defined as the place in which he resides) is entirely ineffectual for the purposes of nourishing the Anamia (although he is free to entice or drag a potential victim back to his lair), as is any blood which is not fresh (such as blood from a blood bank, or that has been in storage for any length of time). Even freshly-spilt blood will not help a Spider Vampire, as they have no good way to collect it before it is no longer useful to them.

To unfold the mandibles requires one round, during which the Anamia may do nothing else. In order to begin the draining process, an Anamia must first successfully grapple with his victim; if the attack succeeds, then the Anamia may attack with his mandibles (using basic Corporeal Forces + Strength). Once the Spider Vampire has bitten the victim, he may drain blood at the rate of one pint per round. Anamiae possess a mild venom that is injected in the first round of the bite; this paralyzes the victim. A victim may make a Strength roll during the first round to resist the paralysis; if he fails, he may continue to make Strength rolls every round, at a penalty equal to the number of pints of blood the Anamia has drained.

In *GURPS* terms, this venom takes the following form:

Anamia Venom, paralysis toxin, comes from Anamia mandibles. Blood agent. No cost (the venom is produced naturally, and cannot be extracted). Causes paralysis; no hit point loss, but -4 DX for the next hour. HT rolls performed each turn, with a successful HT roll negating all effects. Effects take five seconds to show.

Anamiae can store twice as many pints of blood as they could as humans (an average human male contains about 12 pints of blood, so an average male Anamia can store 24 pints), and cannot feed to excess; although their nature impels them to drain a victim entirely, drawing blood in excess of their capacity causes 1 Body Hit per pint drawn, and the Anamia must immediately regurgitate the excess, a process which requires one round. An Anamia may resist the compulsion to feed excessively with a Will roll.

When an Anamia goes for too long without feeding -- more than one week per pint of blood drained -- he grows weak, drawing upon his own body for sustenance. A Spider Vampire without any blood in his system has a week to find and drain a victim; after that, his Strength drops by 1 every week that he goes without feeding. This can be restored by drawing blood from a victim: the Anamia's body automatically absorbs blood instead of storing it for sustenance, each pint raising the Anamia's Strength until he reaches his normal level. If an Anamia's Strength ever drops to or below zero, the Anamia dies.

In *GURPS* terms, this is starvation (see p. B128), with the Racial Special Effect that starvation does not start until the Anamia reaches 0 pints of blood in his system and that lost ST may only be regained by consuming blood instead of rest, and the clarification that the Anamia may not store blood until he is back to full ST.

Strengths

Unlike most vampires, Anamiae can walk in sunlight without any ill effects. In addition, they are tremendously strong and agile (as represented by the additional Corporeal Force they receive; see below), and -- if they go into hibernation -- can subsist for almost a year on the blood of a single victim. Anamiae also have the ability to detect vibrations on the ground on which they stand, or in walls they are touching (in *In Nomine* terms, they add their Corporeal Forces to Perception when trying to discern vibrations in any surface they're touching; in *GURPS*, they have Acute Touch +2, a new advantage which is based on Acute Hearing, etc. See p. B19). Finally, Anamiae are immune to the toxins that are carried in the blood of their victims; this includes anything from outright poisons to alcohol and drugs. They are also immune to all diseases.

Although this is not exactly a strength, Anamiae are again different from humans in that they do not physically age.

Weaknesses

Unfortunately, Anamiae are weak in quite a number of circumstances. Although the traditional stake through the heart will *not* instantly kill Anamiae, a metal spike penetrating entirely through the midsection (such that both ends are exposed, one on either side of the body) will paralyze an Anamia entirely until it is removed (in **GURPS**, a Vulnerability that deals Fatigue damage), and live flame deals twice as much damage to these creatures as it normally would (another Vulnerability). In addition to its unbreathability, smoke also harms Anamiae directly: they take 1d6 Body Hits every minute (or fraction thereof) in which they are in contact with smoke of any kind. (This includes incense smoke.)

Part of the curse of the Anamiae is their death; before the destruction of the goddess who cursed them, any Spider Vampire who died became a Dream Shade under the goddess' thrall. Since the death of the goddess, Anamiae who die still become Dream Shades, but are not under the sway of any influence save their own. (Although the Tsayadim claim to have destroyed all of the ex-Anamiae from before the Purity Crusade, it is known that at least one still stalks the Marches, terrorizing dreamers with nightmares of spiders and death.)

An Anamia's final weakness -- though some might call it a strength -- is the constant call to evil that he experiences. An Anamia can lead a completely mundane life, as though he were a normal human, but if his internal reserves of blood drop below half, he must make a Will roll once per week -- at a penalty equal to the number of pints he is below half -- to avoid succumbing to his cruel, animal instincts. (In **GURPS**, this is reflected in the Predatory Instinct disadvantage (see below). The mechanics are exactly the same as written.)

Failing the Will roll means that the Anamia's personality is subsumed in predatory passion: the Anamia will do anything to get a meal except put himself in danger. Although these Will rolls are only made once per week (when the Anamia's body uses another full pint of blood), they increase to once per *day* if the Anamia becomes empty of blood, and once a Will roll is failed, the soul's personality does not return until the Anamia has drunk his fill. At that point, the Anamia sleeps for a number of days equal to his Corporeal Forces, and awakens with his original personality in place, which remembers with perfect clarity everything that has transpired since his descent into instinct. (In **GURPS**, the Anamia sleeps for a number of days equal to the average of his ST and DX, minus 10; minimum time is one day.) If the Anamia failed his Will roll with a check digit of 6, he will also suffer from a new level of Discord when he awakens -- usually Anger or Murderous, but occasionally (or when Anger and Murderous are at their maximum level) some other Discord that directly affects his mental state. (In **GURPS**, replace these Discords with the Bad Temper and Bloodthirsty disadvantages.)

Transformation

Anamiae are rare creatures; they do not reproduce easily, and vampire hunters make special efforts to kill these evil and destructive creatures. An Anamia may only reproduce on the night of a new moon, and then only when the moon is in the sky after dark (which was, historically, difficult for the layman to determine -- thus adding to the difficulty of reproduction. The ease of determining the times when reproduction is possible has increased dramatically, however, with the advent of the Internet). However, should an Anamia feed on such a night, any victim who is drained completely of blood will rise as an Anamia when the moon next rises, although the victim may use his Will (as normal; see the *Corporeal Player's Guide*, p.80-81, or "[Lost Souls](#)") to abandon his body altogether and become a ghost instead, if he meets the requirements. (Failure means that the transformation takes hold, instead of the soul going on to its final destination.) A new Anamia begins his vampiric life devoid of blood, meaning that he immediately needs to begin exerting his will to avoid going into a predatory frenzy (see above).

Game Mechanics

Anamiae gain one Corporeal Force when they are transformed; the characteristic points must be evenly divided between Strength and Agility (represented in **GURPS** by a level of Corporeal Investiture and +3 each to ST and DX).

They do receive 4 character points for the additional Force, which *must* be spent to increase a characteristic. They have a maximum of 16 total Forces (6 Corporeal, 5 Ethereal and Celestial). Although they have no true vessel (as they maintain their original body, albeit modified), and no true Role (as they maintain their original self), they can purchase any other Resource which a mortal character can purchase -- including Toughness -- as well as Corporeal and Ethereal (but not Celestial) Songs (as reflected in *GURPS* by their Ethereal Investiture, and in *In Nomine* with an Ethereal Connection). Unlike normal vampires, they are *not* beholden to a demon for their powers (and the original spider goddess was killed in the Purity Crusade), and still must make Fright checks as normal humans. Unlike mortals, they can suffer from Discord, and can spend Essence deliberately.

As Spider Vampires are no longer truly human, Shedim can no longer inhabit them; in addition, since they are not truly dead, they are not affected by any attunement that operates on corpses. They are still vulnerable to Kyriotate possession, however, and the resonances of the rest of the Choirs and Bands still affect Anamiae as they would a human.

Spider Vampires regain Essence at midnight.

In *GURPS*, Anamiae are a race, with the following costs:

+3 ST: 30 points
+3 DX: 30 points
+1 any attribute: 10 points
Acute Touch +2 (based on Acute Hearing etc.; see p. B19): 4 points
Acute Vision +1: 2 points
Anamia Venom: 15 points
Awareness: 15 points
Bite: 30 points
Decreased Life Support: 9 points (10 - 10%) (Limitation: Needs Air As Normal: -10%)
Essence Control +6: 21 points
Extra Life: 12.5 points (25 - 50%) (Limitation: Only As A Dream Shade/Ghost: -50%)
Immunity To Disease: 12.5 points (10 + 25%) (Enhancement: Negates 12 HT Requirement: +25%)
Immunity To Poison: 11.5 points (15 - 25%) (Limitation: Only From Victims' Blood: -25%)
Metabolism Control +2 ("Hibernation"): 5 points (10 - 25% - 25%) (Limitations: Must Make ST Roll To Activate And Deactivate: -25%; Character Is Sessile While Hibernating: -25%)
Power Investiture (Corporeal): 10 points
Power Investiture (Ethereal): 10 points
Unaging: 15 points
Unnatural Feature (Mandible): 5 points

Compulsive behavior: Always drain victim completely: -5 points
Predator Instinct (based on Compulsive Behavior, p. B32): -22.5 points (-15 + 50%) (Enhancement: Critical Failure Inflicts Additional Disadvantage: +50%)
Vampiric Dependency (p. CI106): -65 points (-50 + 10% + 10% + 10%) (Enhancements: Humans Only: +10%; Fresh Blood Only: +10%; Only Blood Drawn In Lair: +10%)
Vulnerability +6: Metal Stake Through Midsection, very rare, deals fatigue instead of extra damage: -20 points (-18 + 10%) (Enhancement: Cannot regain ST until stake is removed: +10%)
Vulnerability +2: Live Flame, occasional: -20 points
Weakness: Smoke: -40 points

Total: 95 points.

In historical campaigns, when the spider goddess is still alive, Anamiae also have the following disadvantage:

Duty (Involuntary): -10 points (-15 - 5 - 50%) (Limitation: Only After Death: -50%)

Historical Total: 85 points.

Sample Anamia

Dr. Howard York
London Chemist and Spider Vampire

In Nomine Statistics

Corporeal Forces: 3

Strength: 5 *Agility:* 7

Ethereal Forces: 2

Intelligence: 4 *Precision:* 4

Celestial Forces: 1

Will: 3 *Perception:* 2

Skills: Chemistry/4, Knowledge (Area (London/4), Business/2, Fictional Occult/1, Finance/2, Human Physiology/4, Occult/1)

Special: *Charisma:* +1

Dr. York is a balanced starting Anamia.

GURPS Statistics

ST: 12 [-10]

DX: 14 [10]

IQ: 11 [0]

HT: 12 [20]

Skills: Area Knowledge (London)-15, Chemistry-14, Economics-9, Human Physiology-14, Merchant-10, Occultism-9

Advantages: Attractive Appearance, Comfortable Wealth, Common Sense, Race: Anamia, Reputation (+3 modifier, small community, all the time)

Quirks: Frugal

Total cost: 195 points. Aside from the Anamia Race, Dr. York is a 100-point character.

Dr. Howard York is a newly created Anamia; he has only recently awoken from his first bloodlust. He was horrified to realize that he had become a killing machine, and has begun taking precautions against having to kill again. Being a fan of the occult, Dr. York has not yet realized that he is not a traditional vampire, and so has stayed completely out of the sunlight since he awoke, despite his chagrin that his store has remained closed in the interim. He has gone to lengths to capture rats and mice and drain them instead of having to go out and drain humans, and is not yet sure why he doesn't feel sated.

Dr. York is a very nice and charming man, personally. He knows all of the regular customers of his establishment, and is the type to hand-deliver prescriptions after hours when it becomes necessary. He is a teetotaler, has done his best to stay in shape, and while he is not a miser, he is frugal: his only vice is his home, which although only a townhouse is still his pride and joy.

He is also a vicious killer, when the hunger takes over, and apparently a selective one. His two victims, so far, were two of his best customers, and his most desperate fear is that he is going to start using his customer base as his flock of victims. (Unfortunately, this is most likely the case -- especially if he gives in to his instincts while the store is open. . .)

* * *

*(Special thanks go to Elizabeth McCoy and Brian Hogue for their invaluable assistance in converting the Anamiae to **GURPS** and proofreading. Please note that the conversion of Dr. York to **GURPS** statistics was done without the aid of **GURPS In Nomine**.)*

Gestalt Personalities

A Quick Sketch About Quick Sketches

by Brian Rogers

It's the first session of the new game, and no one knows how they should react to one another. Players with reams of character history are trying to force a realized conception of their PC through the plot, while those "just winging it" are floundering for a character hook. The game feels forced, unsure and not nearly as much fun as it should be. If this is a problem you have, how about taking a look at other serial fictions?

Super hero comics are serial fiction. So are TV shows and pulp magazines. So are roleplaying games.

The defining aspect of serial fiction is short installments which don't fully flesh out characters in the first, or even the first dozen, parts. We don't know everything about Worf in the first episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, or learn all Ham's secrets by the end of "The Man of Bronze," the first Doc Savage tale. The story is 144 panels, a few thousand words, forty-four minutes after commercials, or a four-hour game session. We haven't time for deep understanding of any character. What we *do* learn is how they interact with each other, which is hopefully enough to keep us interested.

Even though we players can design every aspect of our character before play, at the end of the first session all the other players know about your PCs is how they interact with him. Hopefully that's enough to keep them interested. Hopefully, everyone's character personalities interact well enough for the group to work together, but have enough rough edges that the party dynamic will be fun to play.

That's a lot to leave to hope. Sometimes it's better to take matters in hand early on to prevent a party that's bland or destabilized by internal friction. One option is for everyone to lay everything on the table before the game begins, but sometimes you don't want to reveal every nuance beforehand. Half the fun of a game, or any other serial fiction, is learning more about the characters over time. Fortunately, those other serial fictions offer a guideline: the Gestalt Personality.

The idea is simple: While each member of the team starts as little better than a two dimensional sketch, the team *as a whole* produces a complete psyche, with each character embodying one aspect of the gestalt personality. One character is the group's Innocence, another is its Reason. Others embody its Spirituality, Aggression, Reckless Joy de Vivre, or Sense of Responsibility. Together they make up a whole, and the archetypes give each character a clear voice in group decisions.

With a gestalt personality, what would be an *internal* conflict for one fully realized character becomes an *external* conflict for all characters. That external conflict becomes a meaty roleplaying opportunity for the members of the group and, more importantly, everyone gets a good feel for who their characters are within the group. The initial team dynamic is laid out before the first session, showing room for conflicts, interaction, and growth. If faced with the decision over whether to kill a helpless but potentially deadly foe, the aggressive character will be all for it, the honorable one will oppose it, as will the spiritual (but perhaps for different reasons). The innocent may be shocked, while the rational one weighs in with the pros and cons of doing so. Rather than a few seconds of one character (and seldom are RPGs about one fully realized character) weighing this in his mind, it becomes an active discussion illustrating the core ethos of each character.

Players should stake out these archetypes during character creation. Archetype selection has nothing to do with power or skill sets: the Reckless, toss-caution-to-the-winds hero can just as easily be an intangible martial artist as a gravity powered brick. The Responsible hero needn't be a charismatic tactician; he could be a quiet scholar. What matters here is how the characters react to one another socially and morally, not tactically. With the rough outlines clear, players will know how they're likely to interact. Plus, the GM will know more about what sort of campaign to run -- a mix of

Aggressive, Reckless, and Honorable heroes will react very differently than a Responsible, Spiritual, and Logical trio, and demand a different style.

Archetypes should be summed up in a single word: Innocence, Bitterness, Honor, Caution. It isn't meant as a restriction, nor a permanent state. Instead, it's the initial mold, the snapshot of the character as we first see him. The character still has secrets. We expect him to outgrow the mold; he'd be boring if he didn't. If the player wants a greater challenge he may even have a very different personality when on his own, or with another group, or perhaps his apparent archetype is a facade. But even if he is exactly what he appears at the start, over time we'll see more of his personality and watch him grow, like a sea monkey, into a fleshed out person.

Wolverine is the classic comic book example: when we first see him, he's Aggressive -- pure animalistic fury in mutant form; that was his archetype in the group psyche. He clashed with the Responsible leader, was drawn to the Passionate heroine, scared the Innocent, affronted the Spiritual, and so on. Over the years we've seen his own honor, responsibility and spirituality surface: he's outgrown the mold. Sure, Wolverine still acts as the voice of aggression, since that's his part in the gestalt personality. Now it's a tempered aggression, modified by experience, maturity and a struggle for control. While he still plays the same role, he's far from being as simple as he appeared when we first saw him.

Gestalt personality is an aid to getting the campaign off on the right foot. Ironically, by thinking about characters in two dimensions, you can develop their depth faster than by wading in too soon. Next time you're starting a game, try being comfortable giving the character room to grow while making the party as real a person as possible. You may be surprised.

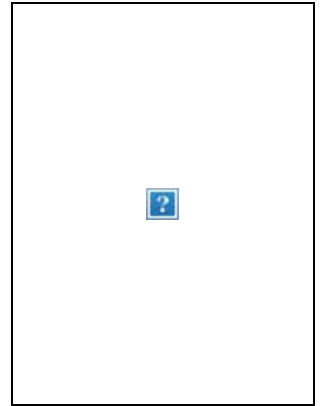
Pyramid Review

The Great Weird North (for Deadlands and Deadlands d20)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Aaron Rosenberg, Illustrated by Jay Rosen, Chad Sergesketter, and Pete Venters

\$20.00



If the *Deadlands* e-mail list is any measure, Pinnacle Entertainment Group's *The Great Weird North* has to be rated as one of the most eagerly awaited supplements in gaming history -- especially among the game's Canadian fans. Although they have had to wait quite a while for this supplement to find its way onto Pinnacle's production schedule, Aaron Rosenberg has made their wait worthwhile. Starting with Pete Venters eye-catching cover, *The Great Weird North* successfully introduces Canada and Alaska into the Deadlands setting, making the book well worth the \$20 price tag. Gamers interested in a non-*Deadlands* campaign may find some useful material here as well, although they should be cautious, as the information on Canada and Alaska is tightly tied to the setting and the era.

The Great Weird North, like most of Pinnacle's sourcebooks, is divided into three sections. The first section, presented as a guidebook written by *Tombstone Epitaph* newspaper editor Lacey O'Malley, is a broad introduction to Canada and Alaska, covering history, geography, and the major players and peoples of the region. With the exception of Manitoba, most of Canada is in the grips of an ice age. Only a fence, designed and installed by the omnipresent mad scientist Darius Hellstromme, prevents the populated southern strip of Canada from being plunged into a permanent winter. This fence runs just north of the Trans-Canada Railroad. This rail link is one of the few national symbols holding the newly formed Dominion together. Unsurprisingly, the other great unifying force is the North-West Mounted Police. The Mounties, in addition to being offered as a player character option, fulfill the role that the Agency and the Texas Rangers fill in the USA and CSA, respectively. Given the vast differences in the nature of the Maritime Provinces, Quebec, Ontario, the plains provinces, and the west, let alone the northern territories and Alaska, it is one of the great successes of this supplement that *The Great Weird North* covers each section equally well.

Rosenberg also does a wonderful job weaving the shakiness of the political situation into the setting, giving players and Marshals adventure hooks rather than a history or political science lecture. Despite the vast territory covered by *The Great Weird North*, the immediacy he gives the major political players of Canada creates a sense of the relatively small population and the claustrophobia caused by the continual winter that hangs over Canada and Alaska.

The second section gives information for designing player characters from the north. This short section provides a list of new Edges and Hindrances, introduces some new equipment, and details how to play an Acadian or Metis (a group that straddles the Native American and European worlds). This section of the book is almost exclusively for players using the *Deadlands* classic rules. Any *d20 System* player looking for prestige classes (or classic players looking for anything beyond an archetype to guide them in creating a Mounty) will have to search elsewhere.

The Marshal's section is perhaps one of the best Pinnacle has offered. Marshals are provided with a host of adventure possibilities of all types. Those who gravitate towards complicated politics could set an entire campaign in Canada trying to triangulate a course between the Mounties, the Hudson Bay Company, and the factions within the Dominion's government trying to hold onto power, while keeping a host of disparate groups a single national entity. If that isn't enough, the tensions with the United States and machinations of Hellstromme provide any number of possibilities for a clever Marshal. Indeed, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City are ideal settings for a campaign based on espionage.

Those wanting nonstop action need only walk north of the Winterline or take on any one of the mysteries hinted at in the player section (and, of course, detailed in the Marshal's section).

The supplement is well-illustrated, although some of the artwork is from earlier publications. While this is not usually a problem, there are some moments when the pictures do not quite gel with the text. The new artwork is universally good. The homage to Dudley Dooright and Snidely Whiplash on page 17 is particularly noteworthy.

The book has only one potential good news/bad news weakness. The good news is that the book provides a large amount of information. This means, however, that the book is very mechanics light. While this is not a great problem for *Deadlands* classic players, *d20 System* players will need to work a little harder to apply the material in their campaign. This, however, is part of the nature of these two rule systems rather than a bias in the writing. Players of *GURPS Deadlands*, however, will likely find this a strength, as it means that there is very little material to convert.

Unlike some of Pinnacle's earlier publications, *The Great Weird North* is cleanly edited. Likewise, Rosenberg's writing is clear and enjoyable to read, meaning that the text does not get in the way of the subject. All in all, *The Great Weird North* is a sound supplement, and worthwhile for anyone with a *Deadlands* game that migrates north.

--Matthew M. DeForrest

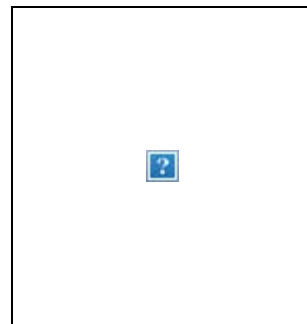
Pyramid Review

Sucking Vacuum

Published by [Alien Menace](#)

Designed by Marc Smith

\$6.95



All is quiet aboard the International Space Station. After a hard day of conducting strange experiments on animals in zero-g, waltzing around in extra-vehicular activity and answering questions from classrooms of 12-year-olds everywhere, the six-man crew have turned in for the night. As they settle down to their nightly litany of "Bonne nuit, Yuri", "Gute nacht Akira", "Good night, Penelope" and so on, they expect nothing more than a good night's sleep. But with a whang, clang, and whoop from the alarm, they are awake and panicking, because the station is hemorrhaging oxygen . . . they need to get off fast! But there lies the problem; the station has just one escape pod and it only has two places. It may only get two of the astronauts home, but each of the six aboard is determined that one of those places is going to be theirs. None of this is helped by years of neglect, which has left equipment strewn throughout the station, with nobody knowing just where any of it lies . . .

Sucking Vacuum is a little game from Alien Menace, who are also the publishers of *Danger Guy* and *Election Day*. It has the look and feel of an old-style Cheapass title, but there the resemblance ends. Designed for three to six players, ages 13 and over, *Sucking Vacuum* comes packaged in an envelope and ziplock bag, and contains:

- Six astronaut figures, each in a different pose
- 18 "Sucking Vacuum" counters
- 32 object counters
- Six Hallway Map Tiles
- 10 Room Tiles
- Six sets of lungs
- Six green glass beads and two six sided dice -- surprisingly, both beads and dice come in their own ziplock bags!

The rules come on a glossy paper stock, and the tiles and counters on equally decent card. Some preparation is required, as these and the counters need to be cut out. Other than this, nothing else need be done or provided for the game before it can be played. That said, it might be an idea to replace the astronaut counters with something a little sturdier and more colorful for easy identification.

The game starts with players taking turns laying the tile sections that depict the various modules and connecting hallways of the station. The Escape Pod is laid down connected to the station by a hallway, and both hallway and pod receive a Sucking Vacuum counter. Each player then places another Sucking Vacuum counter in an area adjacent to one that also contains a Sucking Vacuum counter. Each room is also seeded with three object counters, and the players place their astronauts in rooms that still have oxygen.

The object of *Sucking Vacuum* is to become one of the two astronauts escaping via the station's pod (two people are required because the Escape Pod requires a copilot). They also need to do this after finding a full space suit (which comes in three sections), as there is no air in the pod. Oxygen is the key to playing and winning the game. Every astronaut begins the game with 10 points of oxygen, marked with a bead on their lungs card. This is expended when they move, search the rooms for equipment, or fight other players for it.

Moving, searching, and fighting are what a turn consists of, ending when an astronaut stops to replenish his air supply from the tanks found in every room, searches a room, or just runs out of air. An oxygen-deficient astronaut is left struggling, moving at a snails pace to the next set of air tanks and at the mercy of any other crewmember who wants their equipment.

Astronauts can only carry a limited amount of the station's equipment, represented by the object counters. Astronauts can carry the three space suit parts (helmet, arms/torso, and abdomen/legs), one weapon, and one actual piece of equipment. Weapons can be used to inflict damage upon other astronauts, which is deducted directly from a target's oxygen total. The four weapons include pipe wrench, spare part, toilet scrubber, and frying pan . . . at last, international pan fighting goes orbital! Other objects include spare air reserve tanks that replenishes air supply; vehicles that speed movement through the station; jet packs that let astronauts exit the station and enter again at another airlock; and Annabelle, the station's helpful robot that will explicitly follow an astronaut's single order. More important to the astronauts perhaps, are the Automatic Pilot, which can take the place of the copilot aboard the escape pod; and the fuel pods, one of which needs to be used to fuel the escape pod.

Winning *Sucking Vacuum* is not exactly easy, as the requirements are doubled in comparison to other similar games. Two players have to be aboard the escape pod and fully suited up as opposed to just one, though it is possible for one player to win if the automatic pilot is fitted to the pod. Thus the strategy to *Sucking Vacuum* is slightly different enough to set it apart from other games. This is one of competition and collaboration, so every player needs to pick their enemies and allies with care.

The rules are written in an engaging and clear manner, but do earn the game's minimum age. For example, it advises the players to dope-slap anyone who takes too long with his turn. Although I may be ignorant as to what this is -- sue me, I'm English -- I am sure it warrants the suggested age limit. (*According to the [Car Talk website](#), the dope slap is "a light 'whappp' to the back of the head, done with an open palm in an upward motion. It's the physical equivalent of the phrase, 'Whatta you, a moron?!'" Instructions for proper delivery are also available [online](#). -- Ed.*)

Actually, this is indicative of the humor in *Sucking Vacuum*; most interesting is the inclusion of the Alien Menace Sucking Vacuum Table of Accents. Since the game is set aboard the International Space Station, sporting a fake or foreign accent is not only mandatory, but should add to the pleasure of the game. The table lists 10 accents as well as their suggested inspiration. Thus Ensign Pavel Checkov is the source for a Russian accent, William Wallace/Connor McLeod for the Scottish, Wayne/Ike for Canadian, Count Dracula/Count Chocula/The Count from Sesame Street for "Some Slavic Thing", and Ricardo Montalban/Khan Noomien Singh for Spanish.

Sucking Vacuum has a theme that most players will enjoy, and they should find the game itself to be an amusing diversion. Unlike many other titles within its niche, it has the advantage of requiring no set-up time or the need to import actual game components. That said, the game does cost a little more than many of its ilk. Yet \$7 is not a terrible price to pay for what is a fun, silly game of manic desperation!

--Matthew Pook

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



I Know I Don't Like Not Knowing

This is one of those temporally unusual columns; as I write this, it is in preparation of Thanksgiving, which is this coming Thursday. Yet as you read it, Thanksgiving will already have come and gone. (Sure, print magazines and even newspapers deal with this kind of thing all the time, but it's always odd whenever we, as an up-to-the-minute exciting electronic publication, need to wrestle with it.)

Bonus GM tip: Never forget the ability of cross-wire communications or other delays to create an ironic, humorous, or emotionally powerful situation. Delays between when a letter, article, or message is created and when it reaches its audience can allow a unique perspective, a "voice from beyond," or a vital clue to an otherwise unsolvable situation. ("Hey, Sis: I know I haven't written in a while, but I've met someone. His name is Carlos, and he belongs to something called the Scorpio League. I'm not sure what it is, but it sounds terribly exciting; we're going to his cabin in Zephyr Peak this weekend; I've got a good feeling about this . . .") It can serve as a coda to a beloved (or hated) character, and allow a key plot element or loose thread that may have been forgotten about to be resolved naturally (more or less) after the fact. And players are always weirded out to receive letters that begin, "If you are reading this, then I am almost certainly dead . . ."

Bonus Player tip: If you ever want the GM to be able to use the above technique with *your* character, make sure you establish in-game that you use these slower forms of communication. No, it's not necessary, but it helps keep that ol' suspension of disbelief. ("My Dearest Beloved: I know I've never written you a letter before, but I had the urge. Anyway, I recently realized two things in life that I am eternally grateful for. The first is having you in my life; the second is that I've never been ambushed by my enemies after emerging from a perilous mission . . .")

Anyway, this Thanksgiving is, currently, up in the air for me. I have traditionally been an "orphan" for the holidays; my closest family is about 500 miles away (which is difficult to plan a trip around with my being as busy as I am), and most of my friends go out of town to spend time with *their* families. Fortunately, there are usually folks left in town who will take pity on me and invite me to their shindigs . . . including an "orphan" dinner invitation from the gal I've been trying to work up the Nutella to ask out for the past six months. And it's also possible (although unlikely) that I'll get my ducks in a row enough to be able to actually make the trek home.

So I have more than enough options, only I don't know exactly which option I'll be picking. But, ironically, I *do* have preconceived notions as to *what* I'll be doing; these primarily involve general relaxation, being thankful, hanging out with people I like, and eating enough poultry and carbohydrate derivatives to make a dietician's head explode like a lemming.

Which brings me to the thematic gamery topic of this column: knowing what's going to happen versus *not* knowing what's going to happen. I would argue that just about every enjoyable experience enjoy is appreciated because of the gulf between those two; whatever we are doing, we want both the pleasure of knowing what's going to happen, *and* we want the enjoyment of being surprised. Of course, this ratio is different for each person, and also for each activity. This can range from watching a beloved movie for the 100th time (you know everything that's going to happen, although you are likely to observe or think things you hadn't previously), to being blindfolded by a spouse on your birthday (where you quite probably don't know *what's* going to happen, although you can be reasonably assured it won't involve being pushed into an active volcano . . . especially if you don't live near any active volcanos).

Likewise the same event can meet with different expectations depending on the circumstance. For example, if the floor opens unexpectedly, dropping me onto a dark, padded floor, that's perfectly acceptable at a Halloween haunted house; the same situation would *not* be appreciated at a Thanksgiving banquet.

As with all things, finding the ratio (or, more correctly, mix of ratios) the players and GM are comfortable with will require experimentation, communication, and guesswork. Many players (and GMs) enjoy RPGs because there is a sense of recurring familiarity; dungeon doors will be kicked down, monsters will be attacked, treasure will be accumulated. Many players enjoy RPGs because there is a sense of complete *unfamiliarity*: What is happening in this Mythos-touched town? Can I be certain if these experiences are occurring in the "real" world or in dreamspace? Does

this alternate world contain any context points for reference?

And, of course, most folks will probably fall somewhere in between.

Here, then, are a few tips for understanding your knowing/not knowing dynamic:

Understand both the macro and micro picture. In other words, understand your preferences with individual adventures and with the campaign as a whole. It's entirely possible, for example, for the campaign as a whole to contain a lot of "unexpected/what's going to happen next" moments, while individual adventures have a familiar rhythm that players might enjoy. ("Oh, is this an exploratory mission? Okay; I know how those usually play out.") As a counterexample, it's possible for the campaign to have a familiarity of what will happen next on the macro scale ("You're playing mages who seek redemption; each adventure drives you towards that goal, and you have a good chance of succeeding."), while the individual adventures may all be wildly unknown. ("The Redemption Force that drives you all crackles again within your forms; you awaken in a brick-walled cell; it smells of ammonia and charcoal. You can hear mysterious piccolo music echoing off the walls; suddenly, your familiars start attacking you.")

Direction -- or misdirection -- can be your friends. It's easy to tinker with player's expectations with honesty. If players generally like knowing what's going to happen, but are willing to branch out ever so often, then making sure they aren't *too* frustrated can be as simple as letting them know ahead of time that something different is coming up; saying something like, "Okay; next adventure is probably going to be *weird*, but you should have a good time." can do wonders. On the other hand, having a suitable poker face can make even the most familiar situation suddenly alien and infused with the unknown: "The last goblin falls before your blows. Suddenly a wizened old man appears before you. 'Nonono,' he says. 'That was nowhere *near* dramatic enough. Please try harder.' He disappears, leaving behind a flimsily bound volume with one word in Common on the cover: 'Script.'"

Try to have a good sense of the "worst" that can happen, either as a player or GM. As an example, if the GM is a "by-the-book" sort who lets the dice fall where they may, even if it means death for the heroes, then even the most familiar situation can have a fearsome quality. Sure, they may *resemble* easily handled goblins . . . but what if we're wrong? Contrariwise, if the GM has shown extreme reluctance to kill or maim PCs, then it can be very easy to accept alien situations: "Okay; we're mysteriously on a parallel Earth where a disease has killed 90% of its inhabitants. Even if I don't know what's going to happen next, it almost certainly won't be fatal."

Some people don't care. Many players are quite trusting of their GMs; they may not have any preconceived notions of whether they would rather a new situation be familiar or alien, just so long as the game is fun. Some GMs are also quite adaptable, providing surprises or security as necessary to make players happy. Again, this is fine; if someone says he doesn't care about whether or not he knows what's going to happen next, feel free to take him at his word.

Never eat a piece of turkey larger than your own head . . . at least, not in one bite. Okay; this doesn't have much to do with the topic at hand, but it's good advice anyway.

And it's advice I'll be following myself . . . no matter where I am.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Castle of Magic** board game, Monster card. (a remarkably fun yet seemingly underrated game)*

(One star) "Those who watch B-movies will know that the only sure way to stop the undead is to use a power tool in a deadly and brutal fashion. This defines the 'zombies and chainsaws' subgenre."

The CIA's Grimoire

by Giles Schildt

In worlds of any tech level featuring both magic and intrigue, spies will rely as heavily on magic as James Bond relies on Q's technology. When espionage budgets are large enough, specialized spells will be developed to enable secret communication, recover information from destroyed documents, and generally make spying more efficient. This article includes a simple, optional system for creating secure versions of *GURPS* communication spells, a discussion of selected magical espionage issues, and samples of spells and spell variants that might be researched by an espionage agency.

Secure Communications Spells

Magic provides opportunities for communication that, even by the standards of today's technology, are incredible. In many worlds magical communication is "magically secure," but *GURPS* includes guidelines for eavesdropping on magical communications, for example rolling at -4 to eavesdrop on the Telepathy (see p. M29) spell.

One apparent solution to this problem is to send telepathic messages in a prearranged code; for example, the message "John has a red beard." could mean "The British are coming." Unfortunately, Telepathy, in the words of *GURPS Magic*, is "Full two-way communication . . . Both the caster and the subject know the whole of each others' thoughts." Therefore, any adversary listening in on the telepathy channel would also discover the means to decode the message -- unless both participants were ignorant of the real meaning. (This might work well in a silly campaign, with a brigade of ignorant mages locked in dark rooms handling state communications sounds like something from a *Monty Python* script.)

To make secure versions, double the cost to cast and maintain. Duration and time to cast remain the same. Prerequisites are the insecure version of the spell and Encrypt (p. G78). Double the cost to create any item. If a password for adding participants is desired, add two seconds to casting time and one to casting cost.

When using a secure version of any communication spell, only the original caster can perform an additional casting to add more participants unless he includes a passphrase. (This wouldn't have to be a spoken passphrase; it could be a gesture, spell component, or anything suitably magical. It is just a small variation in how the spell is cast which creates a unique encryption method.)

When a wizard who doesn't know the passphrase attempts to eavesdrop, they must win a Quick Contest of Skills at -10, with each repeated attempt on the same link at an additional -5. Remember to include range penalties from the intruding caster to a participant or the "telepathic link," if the GM chooses to have those exist at geographic locations in his campaign (see below). Anyone using a regular spell in an attempt to listen to the secure one will hear only static or gibberish. Like mundane cryptanalysis, once these penalties reduce a casters effective skill below 3 he can not make any attempt at all.

Some spells, like Communication (p. G20) and Wizard Mouth (p. G61), can obviously be overheard by anyone within earshot of a participant. A secure version of these spells will have Converse (p. G93) as an additional prerequisite. To make Wizard Ear (p. M79) secure from casual eavesdropping, Converse must be cast on everyone speaking to each Wizard Ear. Similarly, the secure version of Wizard Eye (p. M54) only prevents intercepting the data while en route; it does not interfere with other means of seeing items in its field of vision.

To make a communication spell that is difficult to detect and difficult to eavesdrop on, either cast Conceal Magic (p. M61) on all participants before casting the communication spell, or use Delay (p. M63) to link Scryguard (p. M61), Conceal Magic, or both to the telepathic casting. (Conceal Magic could be cast after the telepathy spell is cast, but then it would be vulnerable to detection for at least Conceal Magic's casting time.)

An inhumane GM could even allow adversaries to attempt to divert ranged communication magic with Scryfool (p. G74) by ruling that finding the correct subject is an "information" portion of the telepathic spell. Of course, the truly paranoid can use a traditional code and recognition signal with the secure version of Communication. A spell which provides visual and voice authentication, which an adversary would have to subvert with Disguise (p. B65) and Acting (p. B62).

Espionage agencies might even research spells to tamper with the contents of magical messages. Details are left to GMs malevolent and vindictive enough to want them. One option is a *man-in-the-middle* attack; the initial spell is diverted to an imposter who then establishes his own link with the first caster's intended recipient and delivers an altered message.

The overall security of these spells depends on the GM's interpretation of magic phenomenon. The standard *GURPS* interpretation handles magic as a direct link between the caster and the subject (like a telegraph). (See "[Magic Explained!](#)" by Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch for details.) These could be intercepted by anyone in-between the participants (as the magic travels . . . *not* necessarily a straight line). The caster could specify a longer route to avoid potential eavesdroppers if he pays the longer range penalties. Still, if anyone who makes a Telepathy-4 roll can rummage through all the links with a smaller range penalty than his margin of success, then telepathy is very insecure.

Other interpretations are possible. If magic communication is broadcast (like a radio) then anyone within a reasonable range could intercept it, and it would be easy to intercept in a large, football-shaped area between the participants. If magic is a point effect an attacker has to cast his eavesdropping spell on one of the participants. In a world where magic is . . . well . . . just *magical*, and therefore not bound by geographical concepts, anyone anywhere could listen in, but range penalties of all kinds seem a little inconsistent in such a world.

The GM also needs to decide how communication links can be detected. A reasonable solution is to declare that a potential eavesdropper must detect and identify the spell being used; for example, to could be recognized when it is cast, using Identify Spell or Analyze Magic on a participant or the link, or the like. It could be possible to detect a telepathic link with Detect Telepathy (see below) or Detect Magic (p. M53). Getting a directory of all worldwide Telepathy links every time your roll succeeds by four is probably appropriate only in slapstick campaigns.

Magical and Mundane Encryption

Another important question is how "mundane" decryption interacts with magical encryption and vice versa. Could a mage who listens to the static of an encrypted telepathy link analyze the data with a computer to decrypt it? The answer might be yes if you could accurately record the static (with Memorize, p. G59, for example) and transfer it to a computer (for example, with Data Transfer, below). In practice it's probably best to assume magical cryptographers stay abreast of mundane cryptographic research too, and could make this impractical with current computers. In any event the GM can enhance playability by just saying no, or enhance realism by defining the relative strengths of magical encryption spells in mathematical terms (for example, the 128-bit encryption version of Telepathy). Stronger spells could be carefully guarded secrets.

Simple substitution codes are nothing more than a secret language, and as such could be translated by Gift of Tongues or Gift of Letters (p. M30). The GM could assess a penalty for more creative codes or even treat it as a contest of skills with the cryptographer. However, having a single spell break a complex modern cryptographic algorithm is unrealistic, unbalancing, and (most importantly) doesn't provide any good roleplaying opportunities. Instead, mages could try to read the mind of a person who knew the key, get vague information about the message with divination spells, or use Machine Possession/TL (p. G98) on the computer that decrypted the message; any one of which could lead to interesting adventures. If players insist on using magic to "do lots of math" and break the code like a computer would, determine how much electricity a computer would need to do those calculations and determine spell cost from the fatigue equivalent chart found on page 99 of *GURPS Grimoire*. That number will be quite beyond their magical capacity.¹

Other Spell Adaptations

Some spells are *almost* the answer to the CIA's prayers. Of course, they would commit their vast resources to remedying that situation.

First and foremost would be a version of the History (p. M54) spell that could recover destroyed documents. At the GM's option, this could be merely a variant of the History spell, but it is more realistic to handle this as the new TL-dependent spell, Recover Data, below. This is not the only way a mage could recover erased data. He might cast Repair on shredded paper, or use Magnetic Vision and Small Vision on disks to read erased data as a technological forensic scientist would. (He will certainly need greater knowledge of the disk's format than would be required to read disks that were not erased; depending on how the data was erased, he might need higher magnification too.)

It goes without saying that any espionage agency worth its name will have a magically protected headquarters. Exact details are up to the GM, who can feel free to allow such an agency wide leeway with the research of defensive enchantments. In particular, persistent, area versions of many information spells (for example, Know Illusion (p. M53), Detect Magic) would be developed as powerful intruder detectors for use with Link (p. M64) to create traps and alarms. A variant of Utter Dome (p. M78) with a few doors mundane visitors can walk through is possible. Perhaps those doors would be in mana-drained hexes to prevent hostile spells from entering through the holes. No mana zones are likely to be used as traps or barriers, and GMs might even allow a powerful agency to switch mana on and off like the lights in a few locations. (Such an enchantment would be expensive even by their standards.) Working out detailed costs for those spells isn't important unless a PC is in charge of such an agency's security; otherwise, just define the effects assume the government is willing to pick up the tab, whatever it may be.

New Spells

Organizations like the CIA perform extensive and secret research on technologies important to state security at all tech levels. In a world where magic exists, spells would certainly make that list of technologies. These might be some of the first spells such an agency would develop.

Detect Telepathy
Communication and Empathy College

Information, Area

This spell will detect all spells that involve communication, including spells used for all forms of possession and mind control and those that only provide vague indicators of the subject's mental state, such as Sense Emotion, Truthsayer, and Sense Foes (because the later can identify the degree of hostility). It does not detect spells that merely locate minds (such as Sense Life, Watchdog, and Seeker). If it is ever uncertain if a spell involves communication, the GM's ruling is final.

When cast on an area it will detect only that someone is using magical telepathy, without revealing who. Knowledge of the type(s) of spell(s) being cast depends on the success of the skill roll. The spell(s) would only be named on a critical success. If cast twice on the same area by the same caster, the spell will only detect contact that started since the previous casting, but if cast successfully it can be recast on a smaller area to localize the source. The caster can exclude a known user of telepathy if he specifically mentions it before casting.

Base Cost: 2

Prerequisites: Watchdog, 5 Mind Control or Communication and Empathy spells.

Item: Staff, Wand, or Jewelry. Energy cost to create: 400. An area may be permanently enchanted to detect any use of telepathic spells for 100 times the base energy cost, although this serves no purpose unless the spell is linked to an alarm or trap.

Telepathy Shield
Communication and Empathy, and Protection and Warning Colleges

Area

Subtracts five from the caster's skill on any attempt to cast a communication spell (see Detect Telepathy for details) into, out of, or through the affected area. Remember that Area spells are only four hexes high so a telepathic link could be routed over the shield. Double the energy cost for a penalty of -10; triple the cost for a penalty of -15.

This spell (along with Teleport Shield) will probably be maintained continuously at all secure locations. At espionage agencies a small areas may be left unprotected for official communications and interrogations.

Duration: 1 hour

Base Cost: 1/2 to cast (minimum 1), same to maintain.

Time to Cast: 10 seconds

Prerequisites: Detect Telepathy, Spell Shield, 6 Mind Control spells and 6 Communication and Empathy spells.

Item: An area can be permanently shielded for 75 energy per hex.

Data Jar

Regular

Enchantment College

Creates an information repository within an inanimate object. Nearly any object can hold small amounts of information, but only gems are suitable for use as large containers. A gem can hold up to one gigabyte of data per carat of mass.

A jar can be created either empty or containing information specified by the initial caster, which can never be altered. A "read-only" jar may be enchanted to automatically reveal its contents to everyone who touches it. To place restrictions on the Jar, use a limiting enchantment. The jar can also be enchanted with Data Transfer so non-spellcasters can use it.

Cost: 25

Prerequisites: Enchant

Data Transfer/TL

Regular

Knowledge College

Copies information between two dissimilar mediums. This spell has two subjects, the source and the target; if neither is the caster, add distance penalties to both subjects. Either subject could be a computer, piece of paper, magical data jar, biological mind, etc. The Memorize spell is strongly recommended when storing data in biological minds. If either subject is an intelligent, being it *must* be willing. This spell does not create capacity to hold the data; if there isn't enough "memory," the copy will be missing information. Only data can be transferred, not a subjects soul or intelligence; for that use a possession spell or Soul Jar.

The spell will translate the format of the data, but not its meaning. For example a picture transferred to a computer will be digitized, but a computer program transferred to paper or a human mind will still be just bits -- it will not be disassembled or interpreted. Foreign languages will still be "Greek" to the subjects, however the information could be transferred to someone or something that can translate, then sent back when translated. Even if the target knows the appropriate language, this spell will not grant understanding; however, once the information is acquired it can be studied normally.

The caster must be able to acquire the data from his senses, a willing life form, or a functioning machine. Other sources will require additional spells. For example, to read data from a floppy disk the caster would need Magnetic Vision and Small Vision, but a functioning hard drive could be accessed by providing it with power (such as Lend Power). The information in a book could not be transferred while it was on the shelf, but the caster could quickly flip through the pages.

Duration: Permanent, although a biological mind may forget normally, and *quickly* if it does not understand the data.
Cost: 1 per megabyte of data (minimum 3) (A typed single space page is approximately 4 kilobytes. An 8.5" x 11" picture digitized at good quality is approximately 1 megabyte.)

Time to Cast: 1 second per megabyte. *Prerequisites:* Copy, Scribe, and Telepathy. Machine Speech for TL-6+ versions.

Item: May be added to any Data Jar to allow a non-mage to read or write information. Energy cost to create: 100. Espionage agencies have devices that can record data from the interface ports of various types of computers into an attached Data Jar, but it is not generally known how they are made.

Recover Data/TL (VH) ***Knowledge College***

Information

Recovers information that was previously contained on the subject item, which must be a data storage device of some kind. In addition to the general prerequisite below, the caster must know elemental or technology spells appropriate to the information storage device he is attempting to recover data from, such as Magnetic Vision (p. G102) for disks, Heal Plant (p. M75) for paper, Shape Stone (p. M31) for stone tablets, and so on. Alternatively, the GM could limit the caster's skill with this spell to his skill with the improvised magic noun for the subject matter. In either case, the GM's determination is final -- but he should pick one method and use it consistently.

The caster must touch the erased item (or its remains) while casting the spell. Attempts to extract information from a dead person's brain are left to the GM's discretion, who may rule that memories accompany the deceased into the spirit world and can only be recovered with Summon Spirit (p. M72).

Skill modifiers: For information simply erased: none. If the information was overwritten: -4. If the information was wiped, for example in accordance with Department of Defense Regulation 5220.22-M for classified data: -8. If the media was destroyed (melted, burnt): -10. If the destroyed documents were scattered: a further penalty of -1 for each 10% of the original mass that is missing. If the remnants cannot be accurately identified and other material is mixed in (for example other ashes in the fireplace, assorted protons in the nuclear reactor) extraneous material equivalent to twice the original mass of the document will prevent the spell from functioning. Lesser impurities cause a penalty of -1 to -10 at the GM's discretion. Assess a penalty of -1 if the documents were destroyed more than 24 hours ago, with an additional penalty of -1 for each full week that has elapsed.

Duration: Memory of the recovered information remains clear for one day, after that roll against IQ as per the Memorize spell (p. G59).

Cost: 1 per page of typed information (or equivalent) to be recovered. (A typed single space page is approximately 4 kilobytes.) If the caster only wants some of the information from a destroyed document, he must spend 10% (round up) of the cost necessary to recover all the data (time and energy spent searching) plus the cost for the data he wants.

Time to Cast: 1 second per megabyte stored on the original media.

Prerequisites: History, Repair, and see above.

The previous list is just a sampling of what a major espionage agency would produce . . . perhaps what may have leaked. If magic is common an organization with the resources of a modern government intelligence agency is likely to use magic for everything. It is certainly possible for a major espionage agency to exist in a traditional fantasy world at TL3; their existence is determined by political factors more than technological ones, and magic can replace technology for them too. Many of their spells will be jealously guarded secrets, which of course are the best kind of adventure seeds.

Note

¹ Take distributed.net's 1999 Data Encryption Standard (DES) crack for example. DES was widely considered obsolete because it was too easy to break; still, approximately 10,000 computers plus specialized equipment equivalent to

roughly another 5,000 PCs spent 22 hours breaking the code. With the conservative assumption of 100 Watts per system, this totals 33,000 kWh of electricity. 1.8 fatigue per kWh yields 59,400 fatigue for an *obsolete* code. It's replacement (Triple DES) is many orders of magnitude harder to crack, on the order of 10^{20} fatigue using the same assumptions. A standard web browser can create encryption that would be around 10^{24} spell energy by that formula. Specialized code cracking equipment would substantially reduce the electricity required, but there is no reason to assume magic would be as efficient as a custom engineered decryption machine unless extensive magical research was done to perfect a specialized spell.

Virtual Safari Cyber Zoo Park

A Nice Place To Visit for *Transhuman Space*

by Aaron Kavli

"The call of the wild from the comfort of home."

There are countless amusement parks and tours that allow people to delve into various fantasy worlds via InVids, slinkies, and telepresence. As entertainment industries scramble to find the next popular wave, new ideas come and go with varying levels of success.

In 2089, the idea of a zoo where visitors actually get to *live* as the animals was put forth by Biotech Euphrates as a means of opening up another genetic market. The idea was that people and ghosts would upload into animals with puppet implants, and experience the wild only as wild animals can. Objectors claimed that obviously this wasn't possible without removing a visitor's intellect, but memetic surveys found the idea could become popular and lucrative.

The idea required a large area of wilderness with a modern and wealthy consumer base, friendly to such ideas. The US was deemed the best area for the trial "cyber-zoo," and the Colorado state government was approached. An agreement was hammered out between the Colorado Division of Wildlife and State Parks, Manticore Biotech (who had more pull in the US), and Ardano Entertainment. Construction on the Virtual Safari Cyber Zoo (V-saf) was started in 2091 and finished in 2095. The main complex is some 30 miles southeast of Castle Rock, Colorado, in the Pike National Forest.

The grand opening was a massive success. There was indeed a market for the "reality" of living in the wild and visitors were happy to leave their homes and experience something novel. V-saf was able to skirt laws concerning bioroids and uplifted animals by using neither. Instead wildlife was cloned and left to run free in the 200,000 square acre park. As long as patents and environmental laws are observed, which Biotech Euphrates, Manticore Biotech, and the Colorado Attorney General all ensure, this is perfectly legal.

Despite its legality and commercial popularity, the V-saf was not without its detractors. Preservationists and animal rights activists immediately began to protest -- and in some cases sabotage -- V-saf's operation. They claimed that the fence installed to mark the boundaries marred the beauty of the forest and that the activities were cruel and unusual to the helpless animal clones. The neighboring state of Cibola vehemently objected to the V-saf in both the Colorado and Washington congresses. Many Native American groups in Cibola objected on spiritual and environmental grounds. The protesters and vandals only ensured V-saf kept a sizable security force to keep them at bay.

Those Wild and Crazy Sapients

V-saf offers various packages to its visitors that involve controlling wildlife via telesense (for humans) or downloading (for infomorphs) with puppet implants. Online connections from around the world are available, but V-saf also has a swank hotel that offers excellent food, more mundane wilderness experiences, and high class pampering for those who can afford it. When resources are limited, on-site customers have priority over online ones. All of V-saf's hotel rooms have high-end equipment for InVids, slinkies, and telepresence.

A single, no-frills room with only basic services, a bed, and cleaning will run \$150 a day. Larger rooms that include meal service and more comfortable accommodations cost \$250. Suites cost upwards of \$1,000 each day, and include gourmet meal service, a cybershell attendant, preferential treatment and comfort on all other levels, unlimited slinky access, and a courtesy courtesan. Presidential, Celebrity, and VIP suites can cost over \$5,000 a night, with any (legal) service the customer wants available. Online rates are \$20 an hour, and emulation customers are given a sizable data node residence for \$100 per day.

Most services, such as courtesans, slinky rental, and food are available on a per-payment basis for those buying lower-end packages. V-saf has a series of popular animal slinkies, taken from customers, which are available for viewing. These include controversial animal "snuff" slinkies, allowed as no sapients were hurt. V-saf staff constantly monitors the puppet implants and records the images from the slinkies. Particularly interesting or exciting hunts will be purchased from the customer for \$100 to \$500 dollars at the staff's discretion. Slinky vids not sold are destroyed for legal reasons; visitors cannot take them home.

V-saf provides a complex network of transmitters scattered throughout the park, usually hidden in trees, that allows telesending and slinkie links to be constantly monitored. Each animal has a slinky and puppet implant, which allows V-saf customers to control the animal and lets staff record the experiences. When an animal is not being controlled, it is left to run free.

Visitors are allowed to choose from bears, wolves, mountain lions, coyotes, deer, antelope, and beavers. The three predators are the most popular, but ecological requirements dictate that there are more prey animals. The beaver, with its unique environment, is also popular. Most customers are assigned an animal randomly each day, but there is the option of bidding for certain animals. These bids can reach into the tens of thousands of dollars for bears and mountain lions, but these positions are not in the same pool as other customers, so one doesn't have to be rich to be able to pick a favored animal (but it helps). Those with suites and special arrangements can reserve a particular animal for up to three days at a time. Regulars to the V-saf call themselves lycs ("likes"), shortened from lycanthrope.

Once the visitors are loaded into an animal, anything goes. Customers range from wildlife enthusiasts who try to fully emulate the animal's life in nature, to those who are only interested in the more violent aspects of wilderness survival. Some simply like to chase down and eat (or be eaten by) other animals. Visitors are allowed to do anything with the animal body including mating (the clones are sterile), hunting, hiding, killing, dying, or whatever. No regard is given to the cloned animal, as they are easy to make.

Some regulars have formed into herds or packs (much like old online "guilds"), and run together whenever they can. Some packs are quite competitive and hostile to one another. All hardware is designed to prevent damage from the claws and fangs of animals, so emulations are safe until they leave the animal's hardware should their animal be killed. Despite the general Amerindian opposition to V-saf, there is a growing number who use V-saf as means as a form of the "dream quest."

SAIs are common customers, trying to experience life in all its forms. V-saf turns a blind eye to US SAI customers, as long as they pay. Foreign SAIs, who are often considered citizens in their native country, are offered legal protection and are treated as foreign dignitaries. Many are reluctant to go to US soil, where they are considered property.

The customers can experience the animal's pain if they wish, but both fatigue and hunger are felt to help them experience life in the wild and help remind them to take care of their animal's body. All emotional experiences are from the visitor, of course, and all the animals are mute. This makes trying to communicate with one's pack, if desired, reliant on expressing emotions. AIs are available which will aid in handling the animal, explaining habits and natural behaviors, and understanding the physical needs of the body.

On the V-saf side, experts constantly keep track of the ecosystem. A balance must be kept between predator and prey populations, and visitors must be prevented from doing lasting harm to the Pike National Forest. The park employs a number of Ranger Parahumans that act as observers and biologists to keep things running smooth. They do their best to keep out of the customer's way, but each wears a transmitter that will instantly shut down any animal that approaches within 15 feet for safety reasons. V-saf staff can also shut down or control any or all of the V-saf animals. When an animal is shut down, any emulations will return to their data node at the hotel.

During the first year of operation, V-saf allowed human hunters to go after animals with human intelligence. Unfortunately the "prey" killed two of these hunters, and legal concerns forced the park to discontinue this service. It is rumored by some that very wealthy, and trusted, customers are still allowed to do this, but V-saf has declined to comment.

The Safari Complex

The main hotel and operations center of the V-saf park is located some 30 miles southwest of Castle Rock, Colorado. The 200,000-square-acre park is completely fenced in by an unobtrusive (as possible) electric fence. This is to keep the visitors within the legal bounds of V-saf's reach, to keep protesters and hikers out, and to keep native wildlife from interfering (or being eaten) with the park's ecosystem. The fence is patrolled by stinger bioswarms and small, birdlike airbots.

The main complex itself is designed to look like a hill, covered with trees and even an artificial stream, located on the eastern end of the park. Semi-transparent windows allow viewing from within, but look like natural features from the outside. Overall the building has 24 stories (though the outside landscape makes it much taller) and 1,500 rooms. The rooms are in ascending quality; cheap ones on the lower floors, suites at the top. Basement levels contain all of the staff facilities: ecology monitoring stations, kitchens, parking, security bunkhouses, cybershell storage, data nodes, and the business office.

The main entrance is a large cave-like structure on the east side, with the only gate for ground cars into the park, and a landing pad for air cars. The lobby is where everyone checks in, and takes up the entire ground floor. There are many social and entertainment areas, including the large "Wild Thing" bar and grill. This bar is where many packs meet in person to plan out their adventures, share tales of the hunt, and kick back a few beers. The meat of cloned animals killed during the course of activities is available in meals, and is quite popular among the "hunters" of V-saf.

The host of V-saf is a powerful SAI-8 named Critter. It takes care of all reservations, monitors the activities of, and acts as administrator for, the complex. Critter can manifest itself on any of the V-saf computers, and has a large (but "cute") bear-like bioshell with a pleasing voice box modification it uses to greet visitors.

An electric fence surrounds the "Hill" complex. No animals may approach the main facility, preventing any visitor from running amok inside. V-saf offers aircar shuttles to visitors for a minimal fee, with pickup and drop-off at the Stapleton International (in Denver) and Colorado Springs airports. The Hill is designed to be fireproof as great forest fires are not uncommon in the area. In the case of such a fire, all the animals are loaded with AIs and brought within the hill to protect them.

There are approximately 300 employees (human, bioroid, and bioshell), not including the courtesans which are independent contractors requiring approval by V-saf management, at the site; 100 of them are hotel staff: cooks, cleaners, clerks, and attendants. Another 150 are technical staff; ecologists, rangers, electricians, geneticists, programmers, and the like. Due to violent protests and the possibility of an "Animal Farm" rebellion scenario, V-saf boasts a sizable security force of 50 men and another 50 police-armed cybershells. The security force is also trained to act as firefighters, but they are neither overly skilled nor well-equipped for the task.

Adventures in the Wild

V-saf offers a number of adventure ideas, as well as providing a good vacation spot for simple roleplaying sessions, or the chance to change pace in the high-tech setting of *Transhuman Space*. The following are some adventure seed ideas, aside from obvious ideas for "West World"-type, future-amusement-park-disaster ideas, such as someone hacking the system so visitors couldn't disable their pain input.

A Wolf in the Fold

The PCs have tracked a xox or other wanted emulation to the V-saf complex. It has taken residence in one of the predators. The party is to capture or eliminate the emulation. They will likely need the park's cooperation to disable the transmitters so the ghost can't flee. This will, of course, mean they can't track the location, and they will have to hunt down the animal and kill it to retrieve the data node within. It might be safer to figure out a way to hunt the emulation using the animals. The criminal mind may have xoxed its self and occupy a whole pack of wolves!

Chief Sitting Uplifted Bull

V-saf has a laundry list of critics, among them Amerindians from the state of Cibola. They would be very interested in gaining access to the inside of the V-saf complex, or even the wilderness park. Once in they might hunt down and kill the clones, upload destructive viruses, or just carry out random vandalism and sabotage. As known protesters, they will need help infiltrating the park and ask the PCs for help. Somehow the coconspirators will have to bypass security to get them inside.

A Werewolf in Colorado

The Colorado Wildlife Division has been getting reports of unusual attacks. Three hikers have been killed by what appears to be a wild animal. The culprit is actually a customer of V-saf that has managed to escape with an animal, and is controlling it remotely. Hunting down this predator with human intelligence will be difficult. The PCs could be hired by the state, families of the victims, or even V-saf who wishes the animal returned or destroyed discretely. Finding the human perpetrator will likewise be difficult.

SAI Gone

A visiting SAI customer has gone missing. The SAI is the assistant to a powerful foreign CEO and contains important information. A rival corporation has conspired to capture and brain hack the SAI. Once the SAI was downloaded, a pack of controlled wolves killed it. A bit of premeditated sabotage prevented the SAI from escaping the animal's data node. The wolf pack cannot hurt the data node with their teeth, but has dug it from the carcass and hidden it until they can get away. The PCs could be hired by the park to help retrieve the data node quietly, or the SAI could have contacted them before its animal was killed, fearing the inside man would only pinpoint its location. Perhaps the SAI is one of the PCs. They will have to find the data node, deal with the wolf pack, and escape with it intact.

Ben "Scoop" Stevens

Freelance Newspaper Journalist

by Rik Kershaw-Moore

Born August 3rd, 1921, in Brooklyn, Ben left school at 15 and got a job working as a copy boy for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. After five years he had worked himself up to cub reporter. After Pearl Harbor, Stevens joined the Press Corp and toured with the US Marines, covering Guadalcanal, Guam, and Iwo Jima (among other actions). Here in the hell of the South Pacific, under heavy bombardment, sniper fire, and vicious hand-to-hand fighting, Stevens gained a reputation as an honest and brave reporter, who always tried to tell it like it was and never missed a deadline. It was because of this reputation that Stevens was one of the first civilian journalists to be allowed into the ruins of Nagasaki.

After the war, he returned briefly to the Daily Eagle, working the crime desk until the newspaper closed in 1946. Rather than take up a post with another newspaper, Stevens turned freelance. His first major scoop was blowing the whistle on the Baruch Plan for World Government, which if successful would have meant that America became the guardian of all fissile material, therefore forming the central pillar of a new-world government.

The Baruch plan taught Stevens that the best stories to cover were either science- or military-related, and by using his reputation with the US military he was able to gain access to some very significant projects, such as witnessing Project Ivy at the Pacific Nuclear Proving Ground on Eniwetok Atoll in November 1952, where America tested "Mike" and "King," the first two thermonuclear bombs.

Besides covering the great achievements, he has also witnessed some truly mind-blowing failures, including an infestation of giant ants beneath the streets of Los Angeles. It was while covering this story that Stevens became convinced man was meddling in things he ought not to, and the American public should be made aware of what was going on.

He has, therefore, taken to the road, traveling from place to place, living out of an Airstream Safari Caravan which doubles as home, office, and dark room. As a result of investigating every strange death, mad scientific claim, or bizarre incident, Stevens has published reports which include a deadly radioactive isotope which nearly engulfed America, an alleged alien invasion centered around the north pole, and a scientist devolved into an demented ape-creature.

Yet for every success there are numerous items which have remained unprinted. In many cases, his editors either did

ST: 10 DX: 12 IQ: 15 HT: 11

Advantages: Alertness [5], Common Sense [10], Cool [1], Single-Minded [5], Charisma [5]

Disadvantages: Calm under pressure [-1], Can never find clothes that fit just right [-1], Chummy [-5], Xenophobia 1 [-5], Weirdness Magnet [-15]

Skills: Riding [10], Writing [15], .45 Automatic [13], Chess [11], First Aid [15], Hiking [9], Typing [15], Fast-Talk [14], Gambling [14], Public Speaking [13], Lip Reading [14], Drive (Jeep) [11]

Age: thirty-something

Equipment: Brown Serge Suit, Brown Fedora, Camera, Geiger Counter, Tape Recorder, Notebook, Pencil, Willys M38 Jeep, Airstream Safari Caravan, typewriter, Colt .45 automatic

Description: Stevens is a tall, thin, gangly man, whose brown hair has receded, leaving him almost bald. He has a thin yet friendly face, and greenish eyes that sparkle with intelligence and good humor. He is usually encountered wearing a brown serge suit with matching fedora which have both seen better days and a trench coat on the other side of shabby.

Quote: "My three main rules in life are: Never play poker with an Air Force man, always get your expenses in, and most important, whatever you do, never *ever* forget your Geiger Counter."

not believe Stevens, or he was pressured by members of the military not to file. Stevens is smart enough to realize that such pressure can work to his benefit, and has traded his silence for help. One example was when he stumbled into the path of giant radioactive spider on the rampage in New Mexico. His timely action on contacting the USAF stopped Santa Fe from becoming nothing more than a ruin.

In *Atomic Horror* scenarios, Stevens can be a reoccurring presence, showing up at press conferences, meetings, and in crowd scenes; as time goes by, players may encounter him on his own looking for the story. In such direct roles, Stevens' behavior will often be led by the player's attitude towards the reporter.

If the players are sympathetic to Stevens (and agree to cut him in on any stories) then Stevens will offer to help, including giving the players access to his contacts within the military. On the other hand, if the players antagonize Stevens by blowing him off or running him out of town, then Stevens will do his best to make their lives miserable: dogging their footsteps, asking awkward questions, and getting in their hair. Stevens should not become an omnipresent Dues Ex Machina; should the players become over-reliant on the reporter, then simply write him out of the scenario / campaign . . . ideally doing so in as weird a way as possible. Cool deaths include having his brain sucked out by a Metaran (p. AH52), being squished by a 100 meter high Kaiju, or being subjected to sinister experiments by a mad scientist.

Another way to use the reporter is as an Über-Weirdness Magnet. In this case, Stevens is the male equivalent of those elderly ladies who in their twilight years have turned amateur sleuth. These poor women can't help tripping over dead bodies whether they go . . . only instead of murderers, Stevens stumbles across monsters, mad scientists, and alien invaders.

There is nothing to stop GMs using Stevens in a number of other situations. For instance, the players could encounter Stevens as a war reporter in *World War II*, or investigation weird happenings in other settings (*Black Ops*, *Horror*, or *Illuminati*), just by tweaking his age and qualifications.

Scenario Seeds

The Blob That Ate Reno

DATELINE: PYRAMID LAKE NEVADA. On the shores of the starkly beautiful Pyramid Lake is the Lachlan Industries Aquatic Research Station. Within this ultra-modern facility, Professor Erwin Guinn and his team are working to end world hunger. Guinn has developed a technique where specially bred microalgae are exposed to high levels of gamma radiation, thereby increasing cell size and boosting the calorific content.

Unfortunately, some of these radioactive creations have escaped into the deep azure waters of the lake, where the lakebed proved to be the perfect breeding ground. Soon the wildly multiplying microalgae clumped together to produce a giant super organism -- a luminous green blob (p. 94AH). Stevens, invited to the launch of Guinn's new Super Food, stands witness to the first attack of this massive luminous monster as it rises from the lake and consumes most of the staff and visitors of the research center.

Unsurprisingly, the authorities in Reno don't believe that the research station was destroyed in the way Stevens claims, and so in desperation he contacts the PCs for help. Now it is up to the heroes to stop the giant radioactive blob before it consumes Reno.

Whatever Happened to Ben Stevens?

The investigators discover the wreck of a Willys Jeep on a lonely road close to the town of Escondida, New Mexico. The vehicle registration reads Benjamin Stevens, 34 West Ninth Street, New Jersey. There is no sign of the occupant. Back along the grade is the mangled remains of an Airstream Safari caravan. The air inside the caravan reeks of alcohol. On the floor of the caravan, under an upturned table, is a recently fired colt .45 automatic. Scrawled on the table, in what looks suspiciously like blood, is the word "Dione."

While doing a puff piece on why a small town in New Mexico suddenly turned "dry," Stevens stumbled across a band of humanoid aliens from Dione -- the 12th moon of Saturn, who have arrived on earth to stop the USAF space program.

These aliens, who are nearly identical to us, see humanity as warlike vampires, since instead of blood they have alcohol running through their veins. They honestly believe that if mankind is allowed to leave the earth, they will conquer every world; in the fullness of time, the Dioneme would be discovered and in all probability wiped out to slake man's thirst. So, rather than wait for the inevitable, they have decided to strike first.

Using their advanced technology, they have taken over the town of Escondida -- replacing the townspeople with aliens and holding the "real" humans in a large underground complex. Their next move is to infiltrate the USAF base and sabotage the rocket. They are desperate and will not hesitate to kidnap anyone who gets in their way.

Pyramid Pick

Nanofictionary

Published by [Looney Labs](#)

Created by Andrew Looney

Illustrated by Alison Frane

110 cards and rule book; \$17.00

The latest card game from Looney Labs (the creators of *Fluxx* and *Chrononauts*) takes a decidedly different road from their previous card games, while retaining some of the Looney flavor fans have come to expect. *Nanofictionary* is a story-telling card game where players build their tales using a deck of 110 cards, recite their sagas to one another, then award points for the best stories. At the end of a game, whichever story garnered the most points wins. *Nanofictionary* is not about winning, however. The scoring system is inherently subjective, and the mechanics do not allow for much competitive card play. Instead, *Nanofictionary* is a tool that helps groups of friends sit around and entertain each other with stories.

The name of the game comes from a type of fiction practiced by the game's author called "Nanofiction." A nanofiction story contains exactly 55 words and a title. Players are not limited to a specific word count, but their stories should be short enough to fit on the back of an envelope. There are two examples to help players get in the spirit of the game.

The 110 cards are the same size as standard playing cards, and are as sturdy. While the cards are printed in color, each card features a simple, black-and-white line drawing. The art is reminiscent of the strange *Morgan's Tarot*, printed back in the 1970s. Whether this will hurt the game in a marketplace accustomed to full-color paintings remains to be seen.

The game contains five different kinds of cards:

- *Characters* -- "The Hippie with Really Long Hair," "The Superhero With Unhelpful Powers"
- *Settings* -- "The Dangerous Objects Factory," "A Polynesian Tiki Lounge"
- *Problems* -- "The Interdimensional Doorway is Closing," "A Terrible Accident Involving Food"
- *Resolutions* -- "Duct Tape Saved the Day Again," "They Spent Two Years in Jail"
- *Actions* -- "Complication," "Brainstorm," "Plagiarize," "Uncrumple"

The first four are fanciful elements of the stories that players build during the game. Each story must have at least one of each type of story element, and the strangeness of the elements gives the game its flavor. Action cards allow you to steal cards from other players, dig into the discard pile, and generally add Looney-flavored chaos into the game.

The game has three phases: Writing, Storytelling, and Awards. During a Writing phase turn, players simultaneously draw one card, then play one card. They can add to their stories by playing a Character, Setting, Problem, or Resolution in front of them. A story can have multiple Character cards, but new Settings, Problems, and Resolutions replace old ones. They can also play Action cards to mess with the cards already in play. Finally, they can simply discard any number of cards and draw back up to five. When everyone has completed a turn, a new one begins. New players may prefer to take individual turns for the first game or two rather than playing simultaneously.

When a player's story has at least one of each of the four elements, they can declare that their story is finished. They stop playing cards and wait for everyone else to finish the Writing phase. Players get bonus points for finishing their



stories early.

When all players are finished with the Writing phase, they take turns reciting their tales in the Storytelling Phase. Stories are not necessarily bound to literal interpretation of the cards, and players are free to add small details from outside their hands. The major characters and plot points should all relate to the cards they played, however.

During the Awards phase, each player gives a face down Grand Prize card to their favorite story, and a Runner-Up card to their second favorite. Players also have enough dummy cards so no one can tell who voted for whom, avoiding hurt feelings. If there is an audience of people not playing the game, they can participate as a jury by voting for their favorite story. The story that has the most points from prizes, jury votes, and ending the Writing phase quickly, wins the game.

Nanofictionary's strongest feature is how little winning matters. Most players realize that telling entertaining and funny stories is far more important. Players can even vie for telling the worst story, since strategy matters so little. The humorous suggestions on the cards and the surreal way they connect provide great inspiration for the creative. *Nanofictionary* is a good alternative to competitive card games, and will delight those looking for an excuse to sit around and laugh.

--Brad Weier

Pyramid Review

Carcassonne: Hunters and Gatherers

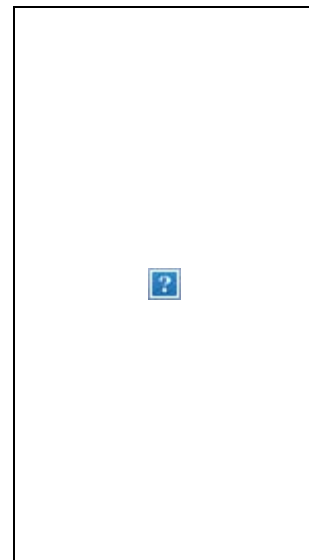
Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Written by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

Illustrated by Doris Matthäus

Translated by Jay Tummelson

\$19.95



In our household, [Carcassonne](#), the German board game of 2001, remains a firm favorite. This is particularly so because it lives up to its description as being "especially good for two players," just as it is for up to five players. The five-player maximum was expanded with this year's *Carcassonne: The Expansion* to add a sixth participant, as well as a host of new tiles that make a good game even better. So when word came of a further expansion, there were smiles all round.

However, *Carcassonne: Hunters and Gatherers* is not an expansion set but a new game. Well . . . it's not an entirely new game, since it uses the same style of play as *Carcassonne*, but with a theme, scoring method, and set of strategies all its own. *Carcassonne: Hunters and Gatherers* moves the game's subject from the Roman-Medieval town of Carcassonne back to the Stone Age, when rival tribes hunted wild animals across verdant meadows, gathered nuts and berries from the bountiful forests, and caught fish from the many streams and lakes, all to provide their peoples with the means of survival.

This being a German boardgame, and a *Carcassonne* variant no less, the production values are as excellent as they ought to be. Inside the solid box, the prospective tribal chief will find . . .

- 79 one-inch square full-color land tiles on sturdy card
- 12 one-inch square full-color Bonus Cards (which are actually bonus land tiles with a different back)
- One scoring track
- Five sets of followers done in brightly colored wood, and posed differently to those in *Carcassonne* -- there are six followers per tribe
- 10 huts that match the tribal colors (two per tribe)
- 10 green wooden discs
- Five scoring cards -- originally seen in *Carcassonne: The Expansion*, these are marked with "50" on one side and "100" on the other, and are used by a player to show when their score has risen over 50 and then a 100.
- A six-page full-color illustrated set of rules.

Like *Carcassonne*, this game is designed for two to five players, ages eight years and up, with games lasting no more than 45 minutes. Set up is easy, since the tiles slip effortlessly from the frames they come in. Once done, the starting tile -- illustrated with a volcano -- is placed down on the table. The remaining tiles are shuffled and put within easy reach. The Bonus Cards are also shuffled and placed aside, separate from the land tiles. Where the tiles in *Carcassonne* showed city, road, monastery, and farmland terrain, in *Hunters and Gatherers* this becomes forest, lakes, rivers, and meadows. The meadows are marked with illustrations of deer, saber-toothed tigers, and mammoths, while lakes are marked with one or more fish. In *Carcassonne*, followers could become knights, thieves, monks, and farmers; in *Hunters and Gatherers* they can become fishermen, hunters, and gatherers.

Each turn, a player draws and plays a single tile. After showing it to the other players so that they can suggest possible placement, it must be put down adjacent to a tile or tile already in play. Tiles must be placed so that the terrain matches that of the adjacent tiles. Where there is no place for a drawn tile to be put down, it is discarded and a new one drawn instead. Once down, a player can also place one of their followers onto the new tile. If put down on meadow, the follower becomes a hunter; on forest it becomes a gatherer; and on a section of river it becomes a fisherman. The aim is to expand and complete areas of forest, meadow, and river networks, and have them controlled by followers.

Once a piece of terrain is complete, it is scored. Fishermen score for completed rivers between lakes and springs, as well as for any fish in the lakes. Gatherers score for completing forests; if the forest contains a tile marked with a gold nugget, a player can draw one of the Bonus Cards and play it as if it were a land tile. Once scored, hunters and gatherers are returned to a player for future placement, but hunters remain in play until scored at the end of the game. Instead of a follower, a player can put down one of their two huts on a lake terrain. These enable a player to take control of a whole river network; like hunters, they remain in play until scored at the end of the game.

Bonus Cards come into play after a forest with a gold nugget inside it has been completed. Each provides a special factor that affects the score for the terrain they are placed next to. For example, the "fire in the meadow" card chases away all sabre-toothed tigers from a meadow (thus removing the score-reducing effect of their presence in the meadow), the "mushrooms in the forest" card adds a bonus to the score of a forest when completed, and an "aurochs" card adds a bonus to a hunter's score.

At the end of the game, players receive scores for their hunters and tribal huts. Hunters score for each deer illustration within the meadow they are hunting, but lose points for every sabre-toothed tiger -- after all, the cats have to eat as well! The green wooden discs help in this process, being used to cover each pairing of carnivore and herbivore as they cancel each other out. Huts score for each fish in the river system they control. Unlike *Carcassonne*, no points are earned in *Hunters and Gatherers* for uncompleted rivers or forests.

Carcassonne: Hunters and Gatherers plays almost the same as *Carcassonne*. Certainly it contains the same strong mix of random and skill elements -- random in the draw of the tile and skill in placing it. The new challenge comes in knowing how and where to play both tiles and followers, but this is sometimes made difficult by having to fit the animal illustrations onto just a one-inch tile. That said, the tiles are attractively illustrated in a rougher style than *Carcassonne*, but which fits the Stone Age theme. After playing both *Carcassonne* and *Carcassonne The Expansion* fairly extensively, it feels rather constraining to come back to playing a variant as basic such as *Hunters and Gatherers*. Yet this variance is what should attract players old and new to *Carcassonne: Hunters and Gatherers* and proves that the *Carcassonne* mechanics can be reworked along different themes. It will be no surprise to see an expansion set to this new game that will add a new player and more tiles, but it will be more interesting to see if the game can be adapted to, say, the Industrial Revolution or modern urban planning.

--Matthew Pook

Judgment At Norumbega

"He hath confessed y' farre into the land there be many pleople [sic], and that he sawe a towne halfe a myle longe, and hath many streates farre broader then any streat in London."

-- from the examination of David Ingram by the Star Chamber (1582)

Unlike other fabled treasure cities such as [El Dorado](#), Cibola, or Ophir, which began as exaggerated [travelers' tales](#), the lost city of Norumbega began, in practical Yankee fashion, with a land survey. Or at least with a map, drawn in 1529 by Girolamo da Verrazano, the brother of the explorer Giovanni da Verrazano, who provided the exaggerated traveller's tale. In 1524, while exploring the American coastline, he stumbled upon a paradise (a "Refugio") of civilized natives, rich fields, golden ornaments, and plentiful food and furs. Girolamo's map labeled this place "Oranbega," while Giovanni referred to a "Norman villa" in his "Refugio." The two terms rapidly became "Norumbega" on maps and in future sailing prospectuses, spawning voyages by Estevan Gomez in 1535 (who attacked a "Norembega" and apparently captured several Norembegans, who were taken back to Spain), Jean Alfonse in 1543, André Thevet in 1556 (who also stopped off in Brazil), and no doubt many others.

The most amazing (and incredible) visitor to Norumbega was one David Ingram, a sea-dog marooned on the Gulf coast of Mexico by Sir John Hawkins in 1567. Rather than wait for Hawkins to return, Ingram decided to walk to the English fishing station in Newfoundland -- three thousand miles away through unmapped wilderness. Amazingly, he popped out of the forest in 1569 at the mouth of the St. John's River in what is now New Brunswick to find a French ship at anchor there, took passage back to Le Havre, and apparently got free drinks for life telling the story in every pub in Essex. Along the way, he had stopped off at Norumbega, which boasted not only enormous round buildings, and streets broader than any in London, but bright red sheep, enormous two-tusked horses, and devious creatures with their eyes and mouths in their chests. Oh, and quarts of pearls, roofs lined with gold, and "much chrystall." Ingram testified to all of this in a marathon session before Queen Elizabeth's spymaster Francis Walsingham in 1582, which was enough to set Sir Humphrey Gilbert off on a quest to colonize this wondrous city.

"Norumbega' remains an illusive historical fact. All the evidence for its geography and associations and origins is unstable or contradictory. On maps of the New World, where the name is most often found, 'Norumbega' can appear and vanish from year to year, alter its spelling, migrate through many degrees of latitude, and change references -- sometimes naming a city, a river, a region, or all three."

-- Richard D'Abate, "On the meaning of a name: 'Norumbega' and the representation of North America"

A quest from which, as it transpired, Sir Humphrey never returned. His ship vanished in a storm on September 9, 1583 in mid-Atlantic; survivors on another ship reported Gilbert "sitting abaft with a booke in his hand" as his ship "was devoured and swallowed up of the sea." Gilbert was a mysterious fellow; making his quarters on the suggestive Red Crosse Street in London, he consorted with the School of Night led by his half-brother Sir Walter Raleigh (like Thevet, a devotee of the magical herb tobacco). Gilbert also worked closely with John Dee, and dabbled himself in magic and contacting the spirit world; intriguingly, Dee's diary notes a visit in October of 1582 from a "Mr. Ingram," accompanied by one of Gilbert's investors. Dee obviously knew more about Norumbega than he was letting on. He owned a copy of Thevet's narrative, for example -- and would have also been interested in the rare herbs and woods that the Huguenot Thevet had brought back, ostensibly from Brazil. Intriguingly, Verrazano also sailed to ([St. Brendan's?](#)) "Brazil" on his next voyage after discovering Norumbega, and then conveniently disappeared (albeit into a cannibal's belly rather than in a Bermuda Triangle-style vortex) the next year. Wildly enough, there exists a contemporary rumor that Verrazano was actually executed by the King of Spain immediately after publishing his narrative of Norumbega, and his latter two "voyages" were hoaxes put forth by his brother for some bizarre reason. This being the same brother who, quite literally, put "Norumbega" (as "Oranbega") on the map -- and it showed up on Vopell's 1545 map as "Anorombega," Ortelius' 1564 map as "Norumbega," and Mercator's 1569 and 1587 charts as "Norembega" (as it also appears on Harmann's 1725 map, the last to show it). In all of these maps, it refers variously to a river, a city, and a region roughly centered on Maine or New Brunswick but potentially reaching either Nova Scotia or New Jersey. Gastaldi's 1548 map covers all the bases by stretching the "Tierra de Nurumberg" from roughly Chesapeake Bay to Cape Breton, and labeling various bits of it "L'Arcadia" (a name given to North Carolina by the

ever-more-suspicious-sounding Verrazano), "Angoulesme" (Thevet's home town and a Templar stronghold), "Le Paradis," and "P:Refuge." Thanks to such chicanery, any chance of finding Norumbega vanished -- hidden, as it were, all over the map.

"This river is that which several pilots and historians call Norembeque. ... They also assert that there is there a big town inhabited by skilled and clever savages, who use cotton. I am convinced that the greater part of those who mention it never saw it, and speak of it only by hearsay. . . . That anyone ever entered the river is unlikely, or they would have described it differently."

-- Samuel de Champlain, *Voyages* (1613)

Certainly Samuel de Champlain couldn't find it, and he looked everywhere -- and if you can't trust a Knight of Malta with no recorded past, who can you trust? (And it's not nice hinting he stole the Norumbegans' gold and hid it in the [Oak Island Money Pit](#).) He especially looked in the Penobscot River valley, in Maine, which as it happened *did* support a long-standing Indian civilization known as the Confederacy of Mawooshen -- who primarily traded oyster shells and pearls (aha!) to their neighbors the Abenaki, Wampanoags, and Etchemen. The Mawooshen Confederacy had ships (bought from Basque fishermen), wore woven clothes, and built wooden houses -- and a smallpox epidemic wiped the whole place out the year before Champlain sailed up the Penobscot. When you notice that the Penobscot Indian words for "quiet waters" (an apt description of the wide bay of the Penobscot River) are *nalambegi*, the mystery is solved. Unless you retrace Alphonse's steps and realize that *he* must have gone up the Hudson River to an abandoned French chapel in North Troy, or note that Verrazano's "Refugio" almost certainly refers to Narragansett Bay. Other voyages give similarly variant results -- even very early ones indeed.

"When I had eliminated every doubt of the locality that I could find, I drove with a friend through a region I had never visited, of a topography of which I knew nothing, nine miles away, directly to the remains of the fort."

-- Eben Norton Horsford, *The Discovery of the Ancient City of Norumbega* (1890)

Because it was quite clear to baking-soda magnate Eben Norton Horsford that "Norumbega" was simply a corruption of "Norvegr" or Norway -- it was a lost Viking colony, which he placed on the Charles River in Massachusetts for good measure. (Other people still plump for Maine, citing the odd markings on Monhegan Island, the Spirit Pond "runestone," and the undeniable discovery of an 11th-century Norse coin on Penobscot Bay -- much like the similarly anomalous [Phaistos](#) die.) To be sure, Verrazano did describe his (Narragansett?) Norumbegans as "inclined to whiteness" for Indians (as Roger Williams did a century later). Viking settlements would also explain Verrazano's description of a "Norman" (Norse) "villa" in the region. His description might even refer to the famous "Newport Round Tower" in Rhode Island, which conventional historians insist was a colonial windmill, despite its loopholes, eight-pillared foundation, and elliptical top (which would explain why it didn't last as a windmill, certainly). Odd notes in explorers' journals mention a "round stone towre" in 1632 (seven years before the official founding of Newport), which is indicative of something, although not necessarily of Vikings. It might have been "L' [Arcadian](#)" Templars.

"I have explored with Sieur Biencourt a large part of this whole region -- all that portion, namely, which the old geographers called Norumbega, including the principal rivers. . . . [O]ur enterprise seems but a dream and a Platonic idea. I might set forth all these things one by one, if this were not to imitate the Hebrew explorers, and rather with regard to our human strength than to God's help, and no less through the faintness of our own hearts than in accordance with the truth of things, to say: 'This land devours its inhabitants; we are locusts, while there are here monsters of the race of Giants.'"

-- Pierre Baird, S.J., letter of Jan. 31, 1612

Or even [giants](#), instead. According to Passamaquoddy myth, Glooscap fights the Kiwakhw, or ice giants, by disguising himself as an ice giant and calling the sea to drown them when they have all gathered to smoke his pipe. (This recalls not only Gilbert's demise, but his and Dee's contention that Norumbega -- and America -- was actually [Atlantis](#).) The Kiwakhw are also described as living corpses that drink the blood of the living, not unlike our old friends the [wendigo](#). Interestingly enough, Verazzano said the Norumbegans "excelled us in size," and David Ingram described them as vampires: "When any one of them is sicke, they cutt his throte and drinke up his bloude." Could the Atlantean giants described by Theosophy have sent an outpost to the West that fell under the sway of the Wendigo? Or could the "seven-foot tall" Lemurians of [Mt. Shasta](#) (also associated with gold and crystal) have bilocated their "refuge" across

the enormous sea that Verrazano swore lay just on the other side of Cape Hatteras -- where Gilbert's patron and brother Raleigh left the [Roanoke](#) colony as an unspeakable offering?

*"At the shut of day
I see the domes and spires of Norumbega town
What sounds are these but chants and holy hymns?
It is a chapel bell that fills the air with its low tones
The Christ be praised
He sits for me a blessed cross in sight
I fain would look before I die On Norumbega's walls."
-- John Greenleaf Whittier, "Norumbega" (1871)*

Perhaps the truth, like Norumbega, is scattered across all these options. The original description of Verrazano's "paradise" correlates surprisingly well with the similarly shadowy [Big Rock Candy Mountain](#). Perhaps Norumbega is actually the giant-built Father of Cities, comprising an Indian pearl empire, a Viking steading, a Templar Refuge, and a Lemurian outpost all at once, with crystal spires that stretch to the heavens. Maine, after all, is the birthplace of America's tutelary builder-giant, [Paul Bunyan](#). Or perhaps "Anorembega" actually comes from the French (who sponsored Verrazano, Thevet, and Champlain) *anormée berge*, "giant buildings" -- and Norumbega is modern-day Manhattan! After all, the carbon-14 dating of the mortar in the Newport Tower produced results ranging from 800 A.D. to 2015, tying Norumbega to all American history at once! The Newport Tower becomes the visible anchor for America's first [skyscrapers](#), erected in shadow and splendor by giants and revealed in visions to mysterious adventurers, and Norumbega becomes the capital of the American Dream, where the streets are paved with gold -- and are always around the next bend. If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Lies: The Key To Comprehension

Every once in a while I'll read something that sticks with me, totally blowing my mind until I can wrap my perceptions around it. Like "Wash. Rinse. Repeat."

Anyway, this week's thick frothy mind-shake comes from 1986's *Legion of Super-Heroes Volume 1* sourcebook for the old Mayfair *DC Heroes* game.

For those of you unfamiliar, the Legion of Super-Heroes is set in the DC Universe's 30th century, where a galaxy-wide collective of strange denizens of other worlds have assembled to . . . um . . . do super-heroic stuff.

Anyway, in the "Chronicler's Notes" at the end, co-author Paul Levitz discusses the challenges of detailing the exploits of the Legion; it seems to be done both in- and out-of-character, simultaneously admitting to their exploits as stories yet sticking with the idea that these stories are "true."

And then there's the quote: "All Legion chroniclers have labored under the need to make 30th century technology and society comprehensible to 20th century readers. As a result, literal facts . . . have been interpreted by each chronicler in a fashion deemed suitable for the audience at the time." This is the rationale used to explain why elements of the early stories -- originally created in the 1960s -- were different from those of the modern tales. For example, the modern stories give all Legion members "flight rings," which lets them fly; in the 1960s stories, however, the members use rocket backpacks. Why is this? Not because the characters in those stories actually *did* use rocket backpacks, but because the "chroniclers" (a.k.a. the storytellers) didn't think the earlier audience would understand a "flight ring."

This idea is a neat continuity dodge that lets all those old stories still remain as part of the canon, while not needing to explain away anachronistic and silly-looking older "futuristic" technology.

Now, this is all well and good as a snazzy means of keeping stories from seeming outdated. But consider the true implications of this; what we're actually experiencing as the audience of the story isn't what's "really" happening in that world.

Let's take a hypothetical example. Let's say that, in the future, we all have all been genetically augmented so that we have telepathic abilities; presuming we have ingested a sample of a subject's blood (or other source of live DNA), we can communicate with each other over considerable distances. These abilities can be further augmented through the use of a "hive mother," a specialized female telepath designed to act as a hub of mental communications; she can contact others without requiring a DNA sample, and use those mental energies throughout great distances of space. These genetic modifications to the hive mother are also incredibly draining; she is (by modern standards) horrifically different from the rest of humanity, and unable to do little else but serve as this biologically preordained communication source.

Unfortunately, when you go to tell a tale of this future, you're afraid that you'll confuse the audience with lots of scenes of people merely *thinking* at each other . . . so you give them hand-held communicators. They aren't "really" using these communicators, but it gets the point of the story across and allows the audience to understand. Similarly they don't consume each other's DNA (which the audience might find distasteful), but instead need to share "frequencies" in order to contact another. Likewise, you don't want the audience to be afraid of the hive mother, so you instead make her a "Communications Officer," and recast her as an attractive normal person that merely uses technology to accomplish similar effects.

So now the scene is set; what would be a disturbing future is now an exciting Trek to the Stars . . . and what would have been a disturbing vision of the future is an exciting version of *Wagon Train* in space. (Of course, there will be problems when the current-day technology surpasses your analogous communicators . . . but surely the days of flip-open portable phones are a while off . . .)

Anyway, once my mind wrapped around the notion that the storyteller could, in essence, be lying to me, I found

myself asking: "How can I use this in gaming?" (Mind you, I do this with practically everything: "Hmm . . . I just found a thumb in my corn flakes; how can I use this for gaming?")

Believe it or not, I don't really have a good idea at present. But I have a half-baked idea for how I might consider using such a theme.

Start with having two parallel games: one set in a fantastic past, the other in a fantastic-realistic modern day. (There are many game systems this would be suited for off the shelf: *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition* and *d20 Modern*, or *Exalted* to any of the *World of Darkness* games, for example.)

The modern game revolves around an investigative sort, ala archaeologists, researchers, or the like. (Of course, being gamerly versions of their desk-bound counterparts, they'll be skilled with pistols and high-speed blind-alley barrel rolls in their 1991 Mitsubishi Galants.) They will be, in essence, chronicling the tales of the *other* group: digging up details about the other party's exploits, piecing together facts, and attempting to craft an accurate accounting of this other party.

"At the bottom of the catacombs, you find the remnants of a sword; it looks as if it once housed powerful -- yet strange -- eldritch energies. Now it lies shattered in three roughly equal pieces. How did it get here? What was its purpose? And how did it arrive at the state it's in? You begin investigating the scene, using all the tools of modern science, and looking for clues.

"Scene shifts. These catacombs house the undying being that calls itself Umet the Wise . . . its very name a mockery to the forces of good that have fallen waste to its dark powers. Fortunately you each have magics of your own, and the hopes and prayers of your loved ones back home fill you with renewed dedication to thwart this evil. You have also learned that the being has hidden the means of its own undoing within these very catacombs: a bladed weapon of some sort, powerful and mysterious."

Certain details of the past campaign are left sketchy; everyone's abilities derive from magic and magical forces (similar to the premise behind *Earthdawn*), but the exact nature of that magic is glossed over. (Given how sketchy the nature of abilities are in, say, many *d20 System* games, this should prove little problem.) Little details about pouches of material components or other trifling aids are mentioned, yet quickly moved on.

As the (linked) campaigns progress, however, more and more details come to light about the ancient setting, via the investigations of the modern setting. The current researchers learn that the magics powering the epic party, for example, are fueled by some sort of ritual sacrifice. Later they learn that the sacrifice is a literal one . . . and comes from the party's own families and loved ones: Each year they wish to continue adventuring, they must offer up one of their own to the harsh deities of the ancient world. (Given a long enough game, this could be significantly foreshadowed. "As you leave your home, you wave good-bye to your three children." "Wait! I thought this character had *four* children!" "The historical record is sketchy; you definitely have three children at the time of this adventure. Perhaps one died in the harsh winter your modern investigations posit happened last year.") They may learn that the previously undetailed material components are actually traces of hair, vials of blood, body parts, and other horrific mementos of these sacrifices.

And then they learn that Umet the Wise was *not* an ironic name, but actually a good and just being that opposed one of the dark forces of this harsh past.

(The modern setting, meanwhile, is living the exciting life of a gaming researcher, dealing with cults that have survived since the ancient times, artifacts that still retain the spark of power, and modern elements that would seek to use their knowledge to bring about a return to these dark times.)

Slowly the players realize their ancient selves are *not* the good guys; evidence of their missions were recorded by victorious sinister forces, and the adventures the modern selves were reconstructing were incomplete, fragmentary, or based on omissions or outright fabrications.

And then they learn of the final climactic ritual their past selves completed, placing them in a state of suspended

animation. Set to awaken them . . . now.

If played right, this final climactic storyline could a very powerful tale of truth, consequences, power, corruption, and possibly redemption. Beings of the past -- with uncertain morals and beliefs, yet with long-forgotten and powerful magic -- are loose in modern times. (Of course, it could also be very confusing to have two parties meeting when played by the same group; one simple solution to this is, at the time of this proposed climax, to have the suspension ritual kill equal numbers of both parties. "The crackling of energy flows around you; suddenly, without warning, beams lash out and strike two of you down . . . your scholarly frames unable to handle the stress. The ritual ends, and two figures emerge from the giant crystal . . ." It would probably be a good idea to ask individual players if they would mind having their modern characters die to advance the story, however.)

Obviously, it would take a very special and trusting group to make this kind of adventure work. And even then it would be risky; after all, many players may not like to learn that they are, in fact, the Black Hats. But for the right players and GM, a story that fundamentally shakes the base assumptions of the game ("What I am telling you is true, or at least your true perception.") can allow for some intriguing roleplaying possibilities.

In all, the notion of the GM lying to the audience (and the players) is a very interesting one, and it's an idea I'm sure I'll be getting back to at some point.

Unless, of course, I'm lying to you.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **GURPS Undead**, p. 125.*

(Two stars) "The main interior chamber of the beast is lit with magical sunrod-like lanterns that the Ring of Iron purchased to keep the hideout lit without clogging it up with smoke."

Austria Is Not Enough

An Adventure for *Castle Falkenstein*

by Steven L. Dickie

"Austria Is Not Enough" is a *Castle Falkenstein* adventure that could easily be dropped into any steampunk game virtually unaltered. This adventure is designed for four to six starting characters. These can be the pre-generated characters listed below, or characters the players already have (see "But We Already Have Characters!", below). This adventure can be run in a single session or can be broken up into two or three sessions as needed, depending entirely on how much investigation the Host wants to run.

Prologue

Four years earlier, the Austrian army was no match for Bismarck. Their forces were pathetic, outdated, and were easily swept aside. The Austrian Empire, known for having one of the greatest espionage corps in the world, would not remain defenseless for long. The Agency of Industrial Espionage (AIE), a new branch of their spy network, was created with the express purpose of advancing Austrian technology through the theft of foreign inventions.

The AIE sought any and all technology wherever they could find it, be it from friend or foe; alliances would mean nothing if Austria were to fall to Bismarck due to a lack of technological progress.

Through stealth, guile, and not a little ingenuity, the AIE devised a weapon such as *The World Has Never Seen!* At present, only the prototype has been assembled . . . but even so, it is a formidable weapon in its own right.

Dramatis Personae

Dawn Flower, Dwarven Engineer.

Athletics [GD], Charisma [PR], Comeliness [PR], Connections [PR], Courage [GR], Education [GD], Exchequer [PR], Fisticuffs [GD], Perception [GD], Physique [GR], Tinkering [EXC]

As with most dwarves, Dawn Flower was named by his mother, and seeks a name worthy of his skills and abilities. He is particularly interested in space and seeks to research possibilities of space travel. He worked in a French lab for a time under the direction of Henri duLac. Dawn Flower made some incredible discoveries; but Henri stole his work and published it himself. Dawn Flower lacked the resources to challenge duLac and so left France to work in England. He currently works as an engineer for the English Ministry of Defense.

Neville Edmonson, Magical Security -- British Secret Service.

Comeliness [PR], Connections [GR], Education [GD], Exchequer [GR], Fencing [GD], Social Graces [GD], Sorcery [GD], Tinkering [PR]

Neville has had the best of educations, and is a practicing Freemason. He seeks adventure and excitement, but has little practical experience. Unbeknownst to Neville, his father has gone to Sir Thomas and requested he bring Neville into active service in Her Majesties Secret Service.

Henry Chetwood, Spy -- British Secret Service.

Courage [GD], Fencing [GD], Fisticuffs [GD], Motoring [GD], Performance [GR], Stealth [GR], Sorcery [PR],

Tinkering [PR]

Mister Chetwood is a field agent and has participated in a hand full of successful operations. He has been assigned to lead the investigation into the technology thefts and their possible link to the AIE. Chetwood should have several cool gadgets in his possession.

James Corigan, Ex-Military -- British Secret Service.

Athletics [GD], Comeliness [PR], Courage [GR], Exchequer [PR], Fencing [GD], Fisticuffs [GR], Gambling [PR], Marksmanship [GD], Perception [GD], Physique [EXC], Riding [PR]

James served as a marine until recently when he was recruited into the Secret Service. His primary function is as security and protection. He has not yet been involved in a field operation.

Colonel Klaus Schneller, Spy -- The Agency of Industrial Espionage.

Athletics [GD], Courage [GR], Education [GD], Fencing [GD], Marksmanship [GD], Motoring [GD], Performance [GD], Stealth [GR], Tinkering [PR]

Klaus is one of the AIE's best agents. He successfully located the wreck of the Albatross and recovered plans for and pieces of several of Robur's creations. After his return from England he will personally be overseeing the security of the final phases in the construction of Weapon X. Colonel Schneller is loyal to the Emperor. When Schmidt's plans develop he will do everything in his power to protect his Emperor.

Lodegur Schmidt, Anarchist, Inventor.

Education [GR], Performance [EXC], Tinkering [EXC], Charisma [PR], Automaton Operation [GR], Invention [GD]

Schmidt was born to a poor farm family in Czechoslovakia. He ran away when he was 15, and through a quirk of fate was able to trick his way into the household of a minor noble. He was appalled at the excesses of the nobility, and secretly vowed to do something about it. After receiving his degree in Vienna, he got into the ASDF. He distinguished himself as an able spy and inventor, and was shifted into the AIE upon its formation in 1866. Due to his ingenuity and ability, he was soon put in charge of interpretation and utilization of the stolen technology. Schmidt knows the Emperor will never fund the construction of Weapon X and will instead want a legion of Prototypes. The Mad Inventor needs the final weapon to make his dreams come true, and plans to kidnap the Emperor to extort the necessary funds.

AIE Guards (40; Hand picked by Schmidt)

Athletics [GD], Fisticuffs [GD], Fencing [GD], Marksmanship [GD], Performance [GD]

Emperor's Guards (7)

Athletics [GD], Courage [GD], Fencing [GR], Marksmanship [GR], Social Graces [GD]

Opening Moves: The Theft

Mister Chetwood has been tracking a suspicious Austrian businessman who he suspects is Klaus Schneller, one of the AIE's top agents. Schneller has been casing a country manor, ostensibly checking the area to purchase some land for his own estate under an assumed identity. Up to this point, Chetwood has been working alone, and arrives to the manor just in time to see a suspicious looking character disappear over the roof of the building.

The manor is a secret base dedicated to the development of new technology. It is run jointly by the Secret Service and the Ministry of Defense. Mr. Chetwood knows it is a secret government instillation, but that's all he knows of the building.

Dawn Flower and Corigan both work at the base. Edmonson is taking a tour during an interview for the position his connections have already won for him. These three will remain in the dark as to what is happening, without the intervention of Mr. Chetwood.

Schneller's goal is the plans for an ultra-efficient boiler, which increases a steam engine's power by as much as 50% over current models. He will be able to snatch the plans from a top floor lab before Chetwood can inform anyone of the theft in progress. However, he should not be able to make it out of the building before the base is put on alert.

This leads into a dramatic cross-country chase. Schneller will steal one of three prototypes of a pneumatic motorcycle -
- **Size:** Small (can carry 2) [×1]; **Operation time:** 6 hours; Brass 60 Wounds; top speed 35 mph -- to make his escape. There are also horses and a personal ornithopter readily available (Size: Small [×1]; Operation time: 1 hour; mostly wood and fabric 30 Wounds; top speed 40 mph).

The chase will lead over much broken country and through a couple wooded areas. Several Good to Great Motoring Feats will be required to keep the motorcycles from crashing. Schneller will also toss some small smoke bombs behind him to help foil pursuit. If the ornithopter is used, it will be severely hampered because Schneller will lead his pursuers through quite a distance of wooded area. His eventual goal is a seaside cliff where he has a small hang glider stashed. He will glide down to the sea to his waiting submersible.

If the players manage to capture Schneller, they will find when they remove his riding goggles that they have the wrong man. Somewhere in the confusion of the chase a switch was made and they managed to catch the decoy.

Chapter One: What Has Gone Before

The British Secret Service has been tracking technology thefts and has been able to assemble an impressive, and undoubtedly incomplete, list. It includes:

- Henri duLac's prototype lightning cannon -- France
- British boiler -- England
- Babbage calculation engines -- England
- Large pieces of Robur's Albatross. Function unknown. From American salvage scow.
- Hull plating from the naval yards of the Bayernese Aeronavy

The rash of recent technology thefts has led the British government to lend credence to the rumors surrounding the alleged Austrian Super Weapon. The characters should be requested, hired, or assigned to recover the stolen technology and/or determine what the Super Weapon is and what weaknesses it might have.

Any in-depth investigations lead to the same conclusion. The thefts all were perpetrated by highly trained operatives, all of whom had similar equipment. Only the sighting of Klaus Schneller ties the thefts to the AIE.

In the course of their investigations the operatives should hear at least the first rumor from the list below and some or all of the rest:

- There will be a demonstration of the weapon for Emperor Joseph in two weeks.
- The Austrian Super Weapon can destroy targets as far away as New

But We Already Have Characters!

If the pregenerated characters are not used, the opening scene should serve as a model. The characters observe a theft in progress and need to be goaded into action (the Heroic nature of most characters should make this easy). This could be anywhere, in any city. It could culminate in Schneller using his submersible to dive through the canals of Venice or he may use his hang glider to dive off the recently erected pylons of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Once the heroes have proven their mettle by chasing the vile thief, they could logically be requested to aid in the recovery of the stolen technology (for either a government or a private enterprise).

York.

- The weapon is code named Weapon X, and is a gigantic automated tank with a Babbage calculation engine for a brain.
- Weapon X is rail-bound, but is capable of traveling so fast it is nearly impossible to see going by.
- Weapon X can fly faster and higher than the Bayernese Aeronavy

By using the stolen pieces of technology from all over the world and some of his own creations, Lodegur Schmidt has been able to design the most terrible of weapons. He has designed a humanoid automaton that would have a human crew. At 500 feet tall it would tower over Bismarck's Land Fortresses and be more than a match for the Bayernese Aeronavy. Code named Weapon X, it would be an able defender of the Austrian Empire. Unfortunately, Schmidt has other plans.

Currently, only the prototype has been made. It will be shown to Emperor Joseph to justify the requests necessary to make his Ultimate Weapon. The prototype alone is a formidable weapon. It stands 60 feet tall and carries a prototype Lightning Cannon, stolen from France. It is reported to be able to run faster than a speeding locomotive.

Cliffhanger

This could prove to be a good point to end a play session. A cliffhanger ending would fit in well with the genre.

During the course of their investigations, one of the characters spots someone following them. The shadowy figure, realizing he's been spotted, ducks around a corner. The dim light of twilight makes the character unsure as to the figure's identity, but if forced to guess would say it was the infamous Klaus Schneller. Giving chase as the party rounds the corner they are immediately blinded by a pair of bright arc lamps as they hear the distinctive sound of a gattling gun being readied to fire . . .

Cliffhanger Resolution

Being forewarned by the sound of the gattling gun being readied to fire, the heroes should have little trouble avoiding getting mowed down. This minor diversion does allow Schneller to escape, however. The thugs manning the fearsome weapon are common scum hired from the waterfront and can provide no information of any use.

Chapter Two: Meeting in Vienna

The surprising lack of information should motivate the group to go to the Austrian capitol (if they haven't already). Any number of things could happen at this stage depending on who sent the characters. If they are spies or have high Connections they may already have contacts in Vienna. These should be able to provide at least sketchy info on the impending demonstration of the prototype for the Emperor. If the heroes lack connections in Vienna they will have to rely on their wits to procure the information clandestinely.

Fortunately, the Emperor is hosting a grand ball the night before his departure. News of the impending demonstration has leaked out, and Emperor Joseph has decided a little celebration is warranted. The characters should be encouraged to attend in some fashion. Weather they are guests or must infiltrate will depend on what type of characters they have.

Information pertaining to the location of the secret base is unavailable at any price. A little determined digging will reveal the mode of transportation to the demonstration and departure times. The Emperor will be traveling aboard a specially designed locomotive. The characters will have to find some way to sneak passage on the train or make plans to follow it.

Alternately, if the heroes would have some legitimate reason for being called in to investigate the AIE, the opening scene could be run with the pregenerated characters as is. This would simply set the stage for the action to come. Additionally, the British Secret Service could show up at some later point to aid the characters at a critical juncture when the heroes might otherwise fail in their mission.

If the group is unable to sneak aboard or follow the train let them know through one of their sources that the Emperor's aide, Hinerich Schultz, knows the location of the base. He was unable to make the train due to a matter of state and is still in Vienna.

The Train

This sequence offers great potential for action. The Characters will not be the only parties interested in following the train. "Representatives" of other governments will also attempt to find the location of the secret base. This could easily lead to a fight with Prussian spies atop the fast moving locomotive or another mad dash on the pneumatic motorcycles from the opening scene.

Once aboard the train they will have to find a good place to hide or impersonate personnel who are supposed to be there. This can be as involved as you need it to be. The important thing to remember is to not let the action slow too much at this point. If things slow down too much, just have the train arrive at its final destination.

Chapter Three: The Compound

The first sight of the Compound is a 300-foot-tall cliff split by an impressive waterfall. At the base of the cliff, near the pool formed by the falling water, is a small building. The Emperor and his men are led behind this building to a curious looking structure. It is a square platform, 20 feet on a side, with what appears to be a guardrail around the edge. Attached to supports on the corners of the platform are cables that meet above the center of the platform and seem to run all the way up to the top of the cliff.

Everyone assembled will be broken up into two groups. Each group will be loaded aboard the platform in turn. Once the first group -- including the Emperor and Schneller -- is settled on the platform, it begins to rise off the ground. As the platform rises, a similar platform within the waterfall will be visible; it is moving down at the same rate the first platform is moving up. Anyone with Average Tinkering or better will realize the second platform is the counterweight that allows the first to be lifted. Both groups will be lifted to the Compound in the same manner.

The cables raising the lift are attached to an iron support with large, well-oiled pulleys hanging out from the top of the cliff. Next to the lift support is a stone building with a peaked roof and a large round tower. A soldier can be seen looking out from the battlements at the top of the tower. Once at the top of the cliff the entire Compound is visible.

The Compound is situated atop a plateau approximately 500 yards in diameter. A pool near the center of the plateau appears to be the source of the waterfall. The vegetation has been cleared from the plateau but some shrubbery has started growing back around the pool and the stream leading from the pool. The Emperor's party is led to a barracks where they are told they will be housed for the duration of their stay. The building has running water provided by large cisterns on the roof, but the only lighting is from oil lamps or candles.

Another building which appears to be a power plant is visible near the barracks. Wires stretch from the plant and are attached to poles that seem to ring the plateau in even intervals. Placed on each pole is a large arc lamp, whose glow provides ample illumination for the perimeter of the Compound at night. The wires can also be seen to enter a couple of the other buildings as well.

All the Compound's buildings are made of stone; some have windows while others do not. Two pairs of guards are on patrol at all times.

The two largest buildings, which happen to be on the opposite side of the compound from the Emperor's housing, each have a guard posted outside. Both of these buildings lack windows, one is the Research Center and the other is the Hangar. The Hangar will probably be of some interest due to its height and gigantic doors. The Hangar is about 70 feet tall and has a set of double doors that extend to near the top of the building. The Hangar has a smaller door similar to the one on the Research Center. The smaller doors on each of these buildings can't be opened, but also seem to have no locks. Mounted on the wall by each door is a small metal plate with a slot in it. The slot is for a Babbage Calculation

Engine punch card. Inserting the proper punch card will unlock the door.

Getting To The Top

There are only a few options for accomplishing this. The easiest would be if the heroes were already covertly members of the Emperor's guards. In this case they would come up with the second group.

The other options would center around a bit more action. They would either have to capture the lift facility (four men each top and bottom); or they could scale the cliff or the lift cables. Either will be quite difficult to accomplish without causing a general alarm and a mobilization of the base personnel. (There is, of course, also the possibility they will come up with a completely different way to steal onto the plateau.)

Again, action and suspense should be your buzzwords. If climbing is chosen, no clichés should be left unused: upsetting a nest of birds necessitating a Good Athletics feat to maintain grip; near discovery as a guard flips a spent cigarette over the edge forcing the hero to duck further into the shadows; someone loses their grip, only to be saved at the end of a swinging rope; the rope frays and is finally cut as the last of the group reaches the top. (This would be another perfect time for a cliffhanger.)

Chapter Four: The Final Night

Once the heroes reach the top, they'll want to look around. If they're on the same side of the Compound as the barracks, they see a large number of Austrian security guards forming a perimeter around a building. They may also notice strange sounds coming from the Hangar. This is where chaos begins. If unimpeded, the guards will storm the building attempting to capture the Emperor. The guards will not go out of their way to kill anyone, but the only person they need alive is the Emperor. When the guards meet with resistance, the prototype lumbers out of the Hangar. It will proceed to support the guards.

If the players reach the top at the other side of the plateau, they may be ignorant of the events at the barracks. They will hear strange sounds coming from the Hanger and will probably move to investigate. There are two guards outside the Hanger door. Once they are overpowered the heroes may attempt to gain entry to the Hanger. As they are about to enter the large building the massive doors open. They see the massive Steam Powered Automaton. Schmidt can be seen pulling a hatch closed on the head, and three Bogeys can be seen entering and closing a hatch on the left side of the torso. Within seconds the massive weapon of war comes to life as steam billows from twin smoke stacks emerging from its back.

Prussian Paratroopers

The Prussians have been observing the events thus far. In a specially modified high-altitude zeppelin, they were able to follow the train and have been circling the compound. Their intent is to spy on the demonstration and to capture or destroy the prototype.

Using homing pigeons, they have been able to relay the location of the secret base to the Prussian High Command. This night has been designated for the assault. While ground troops seize the lift, Prussian Paratroopers drop from the zeppelin, which has been able to get much lower, unobserved in the confusion. Use the stats for the compound's guards for the ground troops and those of the Emperor's Guards for the Elite Squad of Paratroopers. There are 25 men among the ground troops and 10 in the Paratrooper squad (these numbers should be adjusted accordingly to give the party a chance of success).

Logically, Schmidt will shoot down the zeppelin with the lightning cannon, causing a massive fireball and lighting up the night for miles. This should serve to summon Austrian troops, but they will not arrive for at least a day and a half.

Bayernese Aeronavy

If things are truly going badly for the heroes, the forces of the Second Compact arrive. They knew the Prussians were mobilizing forces in the area but did not have the exact location of the secret base. The burning wreck of the zeppelin alerted them to the battle and they headed there as fast as possible.

They will open up with their main guns on the Prototype, and will lower ground forces via long ropes to assist in routing the remaining Prussian forces. If Schmidt has already quit the Prototype this would offer the perfect opportunity for the players to give chase.

The Prototype

Cost: 172 weeks at 17,200c (actual construction time was only 53 weeks due to stolen technological innovations).

Size: Huge [150 wounds]

Powered by: Steam engines and complex clockwork

Operation time: 24 hours (without crew, 30 min.)

Controlled by: Punch cards fed into Babbage Calculation Engines, and long metal levers

Armaments: One gattling gun mounted on the right arm, a breech loading five pound cannon mounted in the left arm, and the Lightning Cannon Prototype is mounted on it's left shoulder.

Description: Giant Automaton, towers 60 feet tall and is constructed from a strange brass alloy that is as strong as iron. The boilers are stoked by two bogeys, a third bogey is responsible for loading the cannon, as a smaller scale prototype the engine room and gunner's stations are too small for humans to man. The cockpit is in the head and is large enough for Schmidt to occupy. He has incorporated the voice amplifier from Robur's Albatross and will call for the Emperor's forces to "Surrender or Be Destroyed!"

Lightning Cannon Prototype

Cost: 81 weeks at 8,100c

Size: Large

Controlled by: Long metal levers

Range: 10 miles

Damage: Terrible (Partial = 80 wounds; Full = 90 wounds; High = 100 wounds)

Description: Large gun constructed from a non-conductive metal alloy. The barrel of the gun consists of a long rod approximately 6 inches in diameter made of the non-conductive alloy running through the center of 50 steel discs 2 feet in diameter and spaced 4 inches apart. If any of the discs are damaged (7 wounds) the gun will be destroyed in a massive arc of electricity; draw a random card, a Spade indicates all in the prototype were rendered unconscious.

Chapter Five: The Wrap Up

If successful, the PCs will return home to a hero's welcome and will have the gratitude of a world leader. If Schmidt escapes, they will also have a new enemy.

If they fail to stop Schmidt's plans, there will be much work to do. The Emperor, if he survives, will seek to employ them to help stop Schmidt and his Infernal War Machine. If the Emperor is captured, the heroes may feel a duty to rescue him and bring Schmidt to justice.

If the Prussians are successful in capturing the prototype, they will have to be stopped before they make it back to their territory. If this is the case, then in all likelihood, the heroes have also been captured and are the only ones who know what is truly at stake.

Scrapyard Battles

Gadgeteering Entertainment for *GURPS Discworld*

by Royce Easton Day

Introduction

On the edge of one of the more unfashionable neighborhoods of Ankh-Morpork stands an arena.¹ Most people would call it an unsightly pile of junk, and they'd be exactly right. But in this case, it's an unsightly pile of junk with a purpose.

Background

Katherine of Quirm had a problem. Her great-uncle four times removed, the famous Leonard of Quirm, had apparently dropped off the edge of the Disc somewhere in Ankh-Morpork. After arriving in the city to look for him, she found the local Guard was being remarkably unhelpful in helping her discover his whereabouts. Worse, she was running low on cash, and her own skills at invention weren't helping her get into the more-or-less male-dominated engineering trade. So she decided the best way to support herself and search for clues to Uncle Leonard's whereabouts was to start a game show.²

After a bit of fast-talking, Katherine convinced the owner of a local scrapyard to allow her to set up stands and a couple of workshops. Then she challenged some of the local tinkerers to come in for the day and try and put together an invention that would accomplish a specific purpose.³ The citizenry of Ankh-Morpork, starved for some new entertainment and intrigued by the idea of someone accidentally blowing themselves up in public, started coming in droves to watch the competition. The so-called "Scrapyard Battles" was born!

Meanwhile, Katherine is supporting herself, and getting contacts with the local mad inventors that might help her discover the whereabouts of her uncle. If she's lucky, she might succeed. If she's very lucky, the Patrician won't arrange for her to join her uncle in his comfy prison.

The Arena

The Scrapyard Battle arena is a rectangular, rickety wooden structure set in one corner of the Steponyourtoe & Son's Scrapyard, located on the outer edge of the ugliest neighborhood of Ankh-Morpork. Tickets cost \$1.00, and cover both Building Day and Competition Day. Two grandstands overlook the team's workshops, each of which is crammed with practically every TL 3+1 tool ever devised. The grandstands are topped off with large platforms, which shade the stands and let spectators look out over the scrapyard proper so they can observe the teams as they scavenge for equipment. Most of the construction materials for the arena were salvaged from the yard by Katherine, but conservative construction techniques have assured that the entire assembly is perfectly safe.⁴

Refreshments for the both the contestants and spectators are provided through a subsidiary of C.M.O.T. Dibbler. Spectators are allowed to bring their own food however.⁵

What in the Great A'Tuin is Being Parodied, Anyway?

"Scrapyard Battles" is a *Discworld* twist on the popular "reality" television program called *Scrapheap Challenge* in the United Kingdom, and *Junkyard Wars* in the United States (available for viewing on Channel 4 and TLC respectively). Hosted by Cathy Rogers and a rotating series of British and American presenters, it sneaks in lessons

The workshops are large open areas set side-by-side, with a 10-foot high wall separating the two team's work areas. Aside from the workshop's tools, teams are also provided with basic assembly materials (nails, wire, rope, string, glue and whatever else the GM is willing to let slide), and a mule and cart to haul salvaged materials from the Scrapyard to the workshop. Salvaging the cart itself is explicitly against the rules.⁶

Seated between the workshops and the audience is Katherine's observation area. From here she has a good view of what both teams are up to. To keep the audience interested during the long day, the observation area is provided with a large imp equipped chalkboard, which she uses to diagram the action while keeping a running commentary going.

The Battle

Scrapyard Battle is divided into three sections: Audition, Building Day, and Test Day.

Audition

On the first Monday of every month, Katherine holds an open audition at the Arena for teams wishing to participate in a Battle. Teams are limited to three persons with a designated leader, and must have at least one person who can demonstrate that they know something about basic engineering. Usually Katherine will settle for the team bringing in some invention they put together themselves previously. Occasionally she'll demand that the team demonstrate their skills on the spot. Teams that prove themselves sufficiently interesting⁷ and competent will be given a spot on the Battle schedule. PC team members must make an Engineering (any specialty) roll, modified by Charisma, Appearance, and whatever else the GM might allow in their attempts to impress Katherine.

Teams who have previously participated in a Battle generally don't have to audition again to get a spot, unless they failed spectacularly in their previous appearance.⁸

Once chosen, Katherine has the team members sign a contract agreeing to show up and participate on a specific date, and in follow-up rounds if they win. Payment for any single appearance is \$25, though she might be persuaded to pay more to popular returning teams.

Building Day Minus One

The main event on this day is Katherine introducing the teams to their Expert, a fellow chosen for skills actually related to the still unrevealed task they're expected to complete. Scrapyard etiquette dictates that it's bad form for the team to grill their Expert concerning his job so they can get clues about what they're going to face. Generally the Expert is paid well enough by Katherine to keep his mouth shut. PC teams can try everything from big bribes to various social skills to get the Expert to open up and give them a clue, but it should be tough for them. Normally the Expert should be an NPC in control of the GM, to allow him to nudge the players when necessary. If the GM makes the Expert a PC, it should be a player with sufficient self-control and roleplaying skills not to spoil the fun.

Build Day

As sunlight begins to pour over Ankh-Morpork, pooling in the low lying areas, the teams arrive at the Arena. In the locker rooms underneath the arena stands, they're kitted out in color-coordinated leather aprons while the audience

on the function of basic mechanics while challenging competing teams to "bodge" together hydraulic wrecking machines, bridge layers, fire boats, aerial bombers, drag racers, ect. out of parts scavenged from a working junkyard. The competing teams have 10 hours to create their machines, and then must put them to whatever task the show has presented to them the next day. The winners get to appear in a follow-up episode, with the two surviving teams appearing at the end show of the season to competing for a trophy (constructed of scrap, of course).

For more information on the show (and some challenges you might want to inflict on present to your players), visit <http://www.junkyard-wars.com/>

arriving above them jostle for good seats and try to avoid catching Dibbler's eye. About the same time that the grandstand's creaking reaches worrisome noise levels, Katherine arrives in the locker rooms and leads the two teams out into the arena to be introduced to the audience.

Step One: The Challenge

At about nine o' clock, after Katherine completes the introductions, the challenge is announced, to be greeted by much cheering from the audience. Naturally the more life threatening the challenge, the louder the crowd's cheers are. After giving the teams a few moments to absorb the nature of their task and do some enthusiastic shouting, Katherine starts the timer on a large mechanical clock, and the teams race to their workshops to begin planning their strategy.

Step Two: The Plan

Now it's up to the teams to create a coherent plan for their machine. The inventors must argue with each other to figure out what they need to build. After they've decided, the GM should make Engineering rolls for all the PCs and the Expert to figure out whether their plan is even practical. Extensive arguments as to who is right should follow shortly thereafter, and continue for the rest of the Battle. Optionally, the GM may require the players to draw a simple diagram of what they want to build, with bonuses to their Engineering rolls for exceptionally clear and coherent drawings.

An important point at this stage of the scenario is to keep the clock ticking. Make sure the players understand that Real Time and Game Time are the same while planning is going on. If the planning session is bogging down, have the Expert or Katherine make suggestions for workable ideas.

If for some reason during the Scrounging or Building process it becomes apparent that their Plan is untenable, then the team can come up with something else. Just keep the Real Time clock running while they figure out what to do.

Step Three: Scrounging

Once there's a coherent plan, it's time for the teams to move into the scrapyard proper and hunt up their building materials. Under Scrapyard Battle rules, the Leader and the Expert are required to stay in the team's workshop, while the other two team member scrounge. The two halves of the team keep in contact with each other by either runners, or more often by shouting as loud as they can.

The scrapyard is quite well-stocked, and the GM should give anywhere from a +1 to +4 bonus to finding items needed for the plan, unless it calls for something terrifically exotic like left-handed Dwarf-manufactured semaphore cogs. Each scrounging attempt takes 15 minutes of game time. If the Scrounging roll is made by +2 or more, then the required item is found with no trouble. A roll made exactly, or with a +1, means that the PC has found an item that might do the job, but needs a little work to fit exactly. A failed roll means the item hasn't been located yet. On a critical success, the PC has found an item that is in nearly mint condition, or will do the job better than expected, allowing a +1 to Engineering rolls during construction. On a critical failure, the PC is convinced he's found the perfect piece of equipment, but it turns out that it is fatally flawed in some manner that won't be apparent until Test Day.

Once the item is found, getting it back to the workshop can be an adventure in of itself. Mechanic, Climbing, and Strength might prove necessary to reach and dislodge some valuable piece of equipment. Never mind Animal Handling when the team's mule refuses to pull the now-overloaded cart . . .

Attempting to interfere with the opposing team's scrounging is a strict no-no, and awfully hard to get away with when a live audience of several hundred people is watching. However, there's nothing in the rules against stockpiling useful items before another team can get to them, though Katherine considers it poor sportsmanship. If a team is hard up for items, it's also legal for them to barter with the opposing team for building materials if they like.

Step Four: Construction

Once all the materials are back at the team's workshop, it's time to put everything together. This will take several rolls against whatever Engineering, Mechanic, or Gadgeteering specializations are relevant. Generally speaking, the GM should require at least one roll each when constructing the item's frame, attaching a propulsion system, and for any other mechanical device that is going to be attached. Each attempted roll takes at least one hour of time. In the tenth hour of construction, each roll takes only 10 minutes, but any failure is treated as a critical failure. Any critical success during construction means that particular component will not have to roll for failure during Test Day.

Example: The challenge for this battle is to build a transport capable of swimming up the River Ankh, and hauling a catapult into place to attack a small wooden tower on an island in the middle of the river. Given the excessively turgid nature of the River Ankh, the Battling Bodgers team elects to build a clockwork-powered walking machine which carries a small trebuchet. The GM requires the team to roll against Engineering (Clockwork) to build the clockwork machinery, Mechanic (Shipbuilding) to repair the salvaged boat hull sufficiently to work², Gadgeteering to build the walker drivetrain, and Engineering (Combat) to build the trebuchet.

Note that teams always complete their machines on time by the end of Build Day, even if they end up scrambling at the very last minute. Or at least Katherine lets them get away with faking it for the sake of a good show, expecting them to finish properly during the Tinkering Hour the next day.

Test Day

Test Day dawns bright and early for the contestants. Far too bright and early, since Katherine generally wants both teams at the test site before the audience starts showing up. Those gadgeteers reluctant to wake up at six o'clock after a hard day of building will find themselves gently torn out of bed by a couple of rent-a-golems that Katherine keeps on retainer.

The test site is usually outside of Ankh-Morpork for safety's sake, though within a half-mile of city limits to allow the audience easy walking access to observe the festivities. Depending on the nature of the challenge, the test area may be on the shores of the River Ankh, on a steep hillside, or near a building that's been recently condemned. Portable bleachers are set up around the testing area for the audience, which usually creak even more loudly than the permanent viewing stand back in the scrapyard.

Step Five: Tinkering Hour

Once the audience is in place, teams are given one hour to tinker¹⁰ with their machines, trying to improve potential performance, correct perceived problems, or just gussy them up with a fancy paint job. If any character missed a critical (in the GM's opinion) roll while scrounging for parts or building the machine the day before, PCs may roll against either their Mechanic or Engineering skills to find the fault and correct the problem. Each attempt to find a failure point and fix it takes ten minutes game time.

Example: When building their walking boat the day before, the Battling Bodgers missed two rolls when building the clockwork engine and repairing the hull. During the Tinkering Hour, they make three rolls on each item to finish them, just barely making the last rolls (whew!)

Step Six: The Test

After the Tinkering Hour is done, Katherine spends a few minutes warming up the audience and explaining the nature of the challenge to them. Sneaky tinkerers might take this moment to try and fix just one more problem if they're clever.

Then the test begins. Due to the improvised nature of the machines that have been built, each team must roll against the Engineering or Mechanic skills used to construct the components during the test. The only exceptions are components that were finished with a critical success during Build Day. Failure means the component breaks down

during the test, and must be fixed on the fly. Each roll to repair the component takes ten minutes. Characters may take a -1 to their skill for every minute they wish to shave off the repair time.

Example: The Battling Bodgers start up their walking machine to make their way upriver to the tower. The shaky clockwork mechanism survives its test roll without a problem. The Gadgeteering roll the day before to complete the walker drivetrain was a critical success, so it avoids the need to be tested. However, the boat hull misses its Shipbuilding roll, and the keel cracks as the Bodgers make it halfway up the river. The opposing team is catching up from behind, so the Bodgers take a -3 to their repair roll to complete their repairs in seven minutes. The player with the highest Shipbuilding skill rolls. Success! After bracing the hull with some scrap wood and nails, they're on their way again.

Besides all the rolls just to keep the machines running, teams must also roll against the relevant Vehicle, Gunner, or other skills to get their machines where they need to go, and perform their needed task. For damaged or malfunctioning components, the GM may assign skill penalties for the task, if he thinks it can still be accomplished at all.

Attacking the other team's machine, unless it's the purpose of the Battle, is strictly forbidden. Violators lose the Battle and are banned from further competition by Katherine. Usually teams are honest at this stage of the game, since they get paid for appearing win or lose.

Example: The Battling Bodger's walking boat makes it into position without further difficulty, especially considering the driver was using his default for his Driver (Walker) skill rolls. Fortunately their Expert does have Gunnery (Siege Weapons) and they destroy their target handily! The Bodgers win the Battle, get sprayed liberally with champagne, and move on to the next round of competition.

Campaigning

Characters

Scrapyard Battles is set up to favor, unsurprisingly, characters with points invested in Scrounging and various Mechanic and Engineering skills. The sort of challenges presented in Scrapyard Battles generally shouldn't require Cinematic Gadgeteering, but normal Gadgeteering might be helpful. That said, all the characters participating in a Battle don't have to have these skills. There's plenty of room for a character whose main area of expertise is lifting (or smashing) heavy objects, or who can do a good turn rowing and bailing a bodged-together boat.

While it can be played with one team made up of PCs and the other made up of NPCs, a more fun option is for both teams to be made up of PCs so that they can compete face to face.

Getting the Players Involved

The easiest way to get players involved is for their characters to spot the notices Katherine periodically posts in the *Ankh-Morpork Times*, and show up for an audition. Alternatively, the characters may be ringers, sent by either the Patrician, who wishes to throw Katherine off the scent concerning her great-uncle's fate, or by the Theater Guild, who are alarmed by the siphoning off of patrons from their performances.

Katherine of Quirm

Katherine is a cheerful, petite, blond human in her mid-20s, usually dressed in men's clothes, and wearing a leather apron with pockets stuffed with tools. During the competition she's normally talking non-stop as she explains to the audience what's going on down in the workshops or during the Test. In between Battle events, she can usually be found badgering team members for information about Leonard and his last known whereabouts. Though not quite in Leonard's class as an inventor, she has a high IQ and many, many points in all manner of Engineering, Mechanic, and Science skills.

She loves her uncle, and is more than a little obsessive about Leonard's fate, spending most of her free hours trying to find out what happened to him. So far she hasn't had much luck, but her naturally cheerful personality has helped her maintain her enthusiasm for the project. Currently, her leads have not taken her in the direction of the Patrician, though he is aware of her search. If they ever do, she may end being a person that has to be Dealt With.¹¹

The Opposing Teams

The player's competition on Scrapyard Battles are a varied bunch, ranging from the mechanically inclined Dwarfs to Trolls trying to prove they aren't as dumb as they look. To grab the audience's interest, Katherine usually tries to create team themes, generally related to the team members' occupations or appearance. An all Dwarf team might be called "The Mining Mechanics," while a team composed of inventive City Guardsmen might be named "The Boys in Blue."¹²

The current reigning champions are the "Battling Bodgers," led by Wowser Munchen, a heavysset Ecks-Ecks-Ecks-Ecks native and Cart Wars enthusiast.

Adventure Seeds

Oh, Leonard, Where Art Thou?

Katherine has finally found a real lead in her search for her Uncle Leonard. A member of one the Scrapyard Battles teams who works in the Palace has mentioned to her that Leonard was last seen being admitted to an audience with the Patrician. Assuming that her uncle must be kept somewhere within the building, Katherine recruits the PCs to help her sneak into the Palace and find her uncle's prison. Assuming that the Patrician doesn't see them coming and immediately have them arrested, penetrating the multitude of traps guarding Leonard's prison will be the ultimate dungeon crawl.

Midnight Requisitioning

After a long day of building, the team has finally finished their invention for tomorrow's Test. Sorta. Actually they aren't even close to finished, and need several hours more time than the next day's Tinkering Hour will allow to get things ready. Either they can forfeit the Test (and never get invited back), or they can sneak into the Scrapyard and finish their project under the cover of darkness. Unfortunately the Scrapyard's owner, Mr. Steponyourtoe, is a more humorless-than-usual-Dwarf who keeps several large and ill-fed dogs wandering at night to keep away thieves. Dodging the dogs while trying to scrounge parts and complete their project under the cover of darkness should prove to be an interesting exercise.

Whoops!

The team's invention of an Automatic-Post-Hole-Digger-And-Tree-Remover, which involved laying explosives to dig the holes and using a giant flame-thrower to burn down the trees, has gone slightly . . . er . . . amiss. The team has to join forces with their opponents and Katherine to shut down the amuck machine before they either get arrested by the guard or their invention destroys half the city.

Footnotes

¹ Well to be honest, it doesn't exactly stand. Lean precariously most of the time would be more accurate.

² Nobody said it was a logical plan.

³ That requirement nearly doomed the competition from the start. Very few backyard tinkerers have a specific plan in

mind when they disassemble the lawnmower to "Come up with something better."

⁴ Or at least the occasional ominous creaking noises haven't led to anything serious yet.

⁵ To the bitter resentment of the teams usually.

⁶ Thus far, no team has attempted to salvage their mule.

⁷ Translation: Colorful enough to hold a jaded audience's attention.

⁸ A sufficiently spectacular failure might actually guarantee a chance to compete again.

⁹ Even if it's walking, it still has to technically be a boat.

¹⁰ Or in some cases, finish.

¹¹ Generally speaking, it's never a good thing for a person's fate to be capitalized in the Patrician's mind.

¹² The fact that Ankh-Morpork's City Guard don't actually wear blue uniforms isn't necessarily relevant. This being the Disc, people expect them to be called something cute like that.

Appendix Z: Red Tape Triumphant

by Michele Armellini

They say only death and taxes are certain. But bureaucracy is at least highly likely, unless an adventurer lives in a primitive tribe. As soon as he moves to a kingdom or a city-state, he'll meet those who count coins and heads, write reports and returns, ask bothersome questions and demand compliance with obscure rules.

Infuriating Subplot Seeds

The following ideas are not really suitable as *adventure* seeds. Rather, they are useful annoying diversions, little subplots and recurring problems the heroes have to solve (or face, or get away from) between killing the monster and having dinner. They may offer some wider scope, provide opportunities for roleplay, situations where to use those social skills. In certain light-hearted campaigns, of course, they might also develop into full-blown red-tape menaces!

The heroes may have to face these mix-ups in several different roles. In a low-powered game, they may be common citizens dealing with the DMV or IRS or any of a thousand minor agencies with overlapping responsibilities, which is a very common experience. Note that even supers who hide under a secret identity, and even vigilantes who don't comply with the laws, will have an ordinary identity; they may escape bureaucracy when wearing their masks, but not when wearing their ties!

The characters might be cops, federal agents, or even Men in Black. They will still need to spend lots of time doing their own paperwork for their own bureaucrats, as well as clashing with the jealous authority of many other governmental agencies.

If the characters are spies or special-ops soldiers, they might think they are above the red tape. Actually, they are members of the "field" branch of their agency -- which, of course, also has its own detestable bureaucracy. Finally, for a change of pace, a live-action hero might suddenly be appointed as an unlikely Department Head (see "Getting Things Done", below), or a whole party of adventurers might find themselves compelled to work (at least for a while) as little cogs in the red-tape machine.

TABLE 19K/II, Section 22, *Uniform Coding Regulations*

(roll two standard regulation cubic dice)

2

Major Overhaul

The Department will soon be gone. Responsibilities will be transferred to another unit, or another agency altogether. Woe unto those poor clerks who had carved their own comfortable niche! They'll be transferred to far-away, inconvenient offices, where they'll be the newcomers, under unknown, hostile superiors . . . unless they are simply fired. But things may be equally bad for the ordinary citizens, the users. The office they were used to will close. Maybe the benefits that were doled out will disappear; the same may happen with their applications or files. The abolition of a large governmental employer will have far-reaching ripples in any medium-sized city. And what will happen of the confidential files, and of the slush funds? Do we want them handed over to the rival agency?

3

Here Comes the Inspector

Heads will roll! The notoriously harsh and unforgiving inspector will be here in a matter of days, and he's rumored to be able to smell a formal inaccuracy or procedural violation from across a filing room. Of course he'll soon zero in on the characters' party, well-known for breaking the rules. The inspector might really be a quintessential, inflexible bureaucrat, to whom regulations are a form of Zen art: compliance is required for the sake of it, non-compliance must be avoided because it's immoral, inelegant and inconceivable. He will therefore pester the heroes about their violations. Or maybe it's all a facade: he's got his own secret agenda, actually, and there might be a tit for tat. Or he's just a blackmailer! Or he was sent by the unseen enemy, see option 12, below.

4

Kafka Was Here

For no apparent reason, the system is waging an undeclared war against an individual (or a whole group). The harassment and nuisance are obviously absurd, if one uses a bit of common sense; but, from the bureaucrats' point of view, the accusations are absolutely flawless and the heroes are dead wrong. For instance, a hard-working cop is declared dead, and, indeed, registered as such! No pay for him this month . . . unless he can prove he is alive. Appearing in person before a bureaucrat and banging a fist on his desk is not a proof, of course: only *proper documentation* is a proof. Another character might be dragged in court because of all those old unpaid driving fines -- all issued when he was eight years old. Or the Internal Review Committee asks the party what they did with Secret Item 29-445; the characters never heard about it, let alone seen it. Most of the time spent in these situations will be lost due to minor procedural points, so that it seems the inquiry never comes closer to the core of the matter, or to an end. Recommended reading: Kafka's *The Trial*.

5

The Lost Archives

A bureaucrat's treasure is his documentation. But like any treasure, it might get lost. Or stolen, or intentionally destroyed. When a whole filing room becomes unavailable, there are lots of consequences; and the heroes will feel closer to their fellow citizens if *their* files are gone, too. For instance, the temple's archive was washed away in the floods; now, who knows who paid their tithes and who didn't? The city databanks were destroyed in a cyber-terrorists' attack; among the lost info, there's something that is critical for the party's latest endeavor. The Nazis are using the local authorities' archives to find the Jews; will some obscure filing clerk defy or deceive them? Somebody burned down the Museum offices with all their records -- what did he want to hide?

6

Budget Cuts

Whichever way it's handled, yes, there are budget cuts. It seems every year there's less money to go around. What offices will be closed down this time? Who's going to lose his overtime allowances? His company car? Or his job? Even once-powerful spies can be fired, as many former East-Germany Stasi agents may testify. While making the character jobless is a possibility, it might be a tad too drastic. An interesting alternative would be to enforce strict spending limits. Maybe there's a new, penny-pinching, bean-counting captain. And if the heroes spend too much, it will be *their* team, or office, the next one to be cut.

7

Everything by the Book

There are three ways of doing things: the right one, the wrong one, and the bureaucrats' one. Whatever the characters are trying to accomplish, there are superiors and head clerks and inventory overseers breathing down their necks to make sure the third way is chosen. While they are stealthily breaking into the drug factory, they receive a phone call reminding them they need to submit form C24. As they are trying to recruit spearmen, the sheriff notices the king's seal on their authorization seems to be the wrong one. This subplot is especially useful to the GM if the players like to play a bit too much fast and loose. If they just don't heed the bureaucrats, this only makes subplot 3, above, more

likely.

8

The Maze

Before going to the Procurements Department, our bold heroes should have filled in the proper application, which they can obtain from the main office, downtown. Oh, it's already closed by now. They'll need to try again tomorrow, but who knows whether they remembered to gain their superior's authorization in writing? Once everything is in order, they'll just wait for their request to be processed. In a few days, it might turn out one of them forgot to send along his own waiver. Back to square one. This is a very common situation; a GM might use it to delay things if he needs to, or to discourage a certain course of action, or . . . to tease the players and see whether the characters can control their bad temper!

9

The Department Strikes Back

Nothing is uglier than a bureaucratic war. Tension between two departments of the same agency finally erupts in open hostilities. Memos fly back and forth, grapevine rumors become outrageous. Then, as both sides recruit allies in the Personnel, Appropriations and Procurements, and Internal Affairs Departments, the opponent's employees, resources, car parks, ego perks, and even office equipment become fair game. If the PCs work for this agency, they'll be caught in the middle as nobody, not even field agents, can remain neutral. If they are ordinary citizens, they'll see their applications or files swept up in the hurricane, and possibly, their case will become just a pawn in the war.

10

Language Problems

Do the bureaucrats actually speak our own language? Sometimes, it seems they don't. Before a mission, the agents get a hurried briefing from an official of the Inter-Departmental Compliance Office. He sternly warns them not to violate *again* Clause 23.5 of Regulation 236C. When asked for clarifications, the bureaucrat explains: "It's the clause about non-forfeiture of advance realized participations, but make sure you invoke it if a third-party representative claims an appropriation pursuant to Section 13 pre-emption statements." Alternatively, at a most inconvenient time, the heroes are handed a form to fill in, a report to approve, an agreement to sign -- and they can't make head or tail of it. Requests for explanations cause more confusion. Probably the party will complete the form at random, approve the report without understanding it, or throw away the agreement; and for the time being, that will be the end. But later on, their action will have major, far-reaching bureaucratic or legal repercussions. For a nice sample of incomprehensible prose, see the [legal boilerplate](#).

11

Getting Things Done!

The bureaucracy has become so inefficient that the politicians above it have vowed to refocus it on "getting things done." The proverbial blunt pragmatists are put in charge, and they start cutting through the red tape. The PCs themselves might get this role, or maybe they are bureaucrats, or casual bystanders as problems begin. For starters, the bureaucrats stonewall the newcomers and boycott their attempts. Then, *sometimes* there is a reason for all of the paperwork; the pragmatists might well choose the wrong place where to dispose of it, and, lacking proper documentation, quickly lose track of what they are actually achieving! Also, the pragmatists may have carte blanche, in theory, in a given area; but what happens when their decision to dispense with Step 34.6 of the Standard Procedure impinges on the preserve of *another* agency? Finally, when you suspect a department is doing nothing useful, you can't just suppress it. Of course, you have to appoint a commission which will produce, in due time, a feasibility study about how to suppress that department, and the commission will need clerks, secretaries, filing archivists . . .

12

The Unseen Hand

Any of the above emergencies, or maybe more than one, might be happening, but not by mere chance. There actually is a mastermind, a villain, behind it all, and the bureaucracy is his tool. Given time, he'll slowly, secretly, indirectly ruin the heroes, or discredit them, or make them otherwise incapable of hurting his own plans. This idea is particularly useful if the party is so powerful that nothing short of an elder demon can defeat them in a *direct* confrontation. The villain is probably someone who's not combat-oriented, but socially powerful, with close links to the bureaucracy. If the GM can't adapt his own creatures for this role, ideas can be found in ***GURPS Villains***, pp. 8, 96, 126.

Pyramid Review

Lost Colony (tied to Hell on Earth and Hell on Earth d20)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by John Hopley

Illustrated by Richard Pollard and Chris Appel

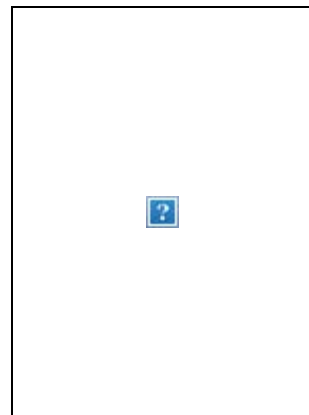
144 pages; \$25.00

Lost Colony is difficult to immediately classify. As the newest free-standing setting in Pinnacle Entertainment Group's *Deadlands* line, it could be classified as an independent roleplaying game. As it requires the *Hell on Earth* rulebook to play the game (a decision that has advantages and disadvantages), it is a supplement rather than an independent game. Whichever it is, *Lost Colony* provides an interesting and complex setting for gamers. Marshals will find the possibility for everything from the traditional dark castle dungeon crawl to futuristic science fiction settings -- all tinged with horror. Perhaps most interesting for a game in Pinnacle's flagship line, *Lost Colony* resists many of the expectations that come from a *Deadlands* based game -- a story-driven game based ultimately on the western genre -- without departing from the core vision of the game world. Fans of Pinnacle Entertainment Group's prior offerings and those who enjoy cross-genre games will probably enjoy *Lost Colony*. Those who actively dislike (and cannot ignore) a setting with an overarching storyline or Pinnacle's *Deadlands* settings should probably look elsewhere.

Lost Colony is set in the Faraway star system, where player characters can take the role of either earth colonists or Anouks, an indigenous sentient humanoid race. While the humans possess a more advanced technology, they have been cut off from earth by the collapse of the wormhole-like Tunnel that connects the two star systems. The Anouks, on the other hand, possess only a stone-age level technology. Their advantage is in a spiritual connection to the planet Banshee and the ability to mold and spiritually charge a type of stone called Tannis. As in all of the *Deadlands* settings, magic does exist, and there are a number of new ways to use magic and magic-like effects in this setting. The Anouks, for example, can shape Tannis with their hands and charge it with mystical energy to increase its ability to do damage or protect. The new Mute arcane background lets the character use implanted nanobots to break down, repair, and rebuild technological objects.

Rules exist for bringing all of the player character types in from the *Deadlands* and *Hell on Earth* games while introducing several new possibilities. In *d20 System* terms, this means five new character classes (Colonial Ranger, Mute, Spacer, Anouk Shaman, and Anouk Warrior) and a new Guardian prestige class, tucked comfortably in the Marshal's section and described later in this review. Those using Pinnacle's own rules will find a list of new aptitudes, edges, and hindrances to cover everything from being born in space or on Banshee to choosing the Mute arcane background.

The parallel between the setting and the wild west is obvious and intentional, as evidenced by the early "Way Out West" tag line, placing it firmly in the "Weird" and "Wasted West" trilogy. The Colonial Rangers, for example, are the inheritors of the "One Riot, One Ranger" philosophy of their Texas predecessors; and Debbie Dallas, the narrator of the "Welcome to Banshee" introduction, points out the similarities between the Anouks and the Plains Indians. As such, this game is not built on the "sci-fi = space opera" equation. This game is more like the sci-fi show *Firefly* and the films that use interplanetary settings to recreate a frontier world. There is certainly room in *Lost Colony* for *Star Wars*, moments but they are more likely to echo the Mos Eisley cantina than they are the corridors of the Death Star. (That being said, Hellstromme Industry's Tunnel Station *does* provide Marshals and players with a large and menacing space station.)



Lost Colony's setting is vast. While *Deadlands* and *Hell on Earth* primarily limited themselves to the American West, *Lost Colony* opens up an entire star system for exploration. Although many of the sites are given only brief descriptions, they do provide Marshals with enough material to create a host of adventures. The town of Temptation is detailed more fully than other locations, making it a logical place for players to begin their adventures. Unfortunately, the game does not come with a starting adventure, although there is a free adventure available for download on Pinnacle's web site.

The lack of an introductory adventure, character creation rules, and skill resolution system gives author John Hopley a lot more room to detail the specifics of Banshee and its surrounding system. This creates perhaps the greatest strength of the book -- a near complete game world. The downside, however, is that players and Marshals will be flipping through several books to find all the information they need to create characters and run a game.

The artwork is universally good. The cover and several of the interior pieces harken back to prior illustrations in the *Deadlands* line. This work continues the Pinnacle tradition of references to other works. In this case, an episode of the Simpsons provides the name for Flaming Mo's, Temptation's main watering hole.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

If the players and Marshal are familiar with the *Deadlands* storyline, they will be well-prepared for what is in this book. *Lost Colony*'s timeline begins in the days following the end of the *Hell on Earth* adventure *The Unity*. This adventure helps set up the major conflict for the overarching storyline. The Reckoners have been brought to the living planet of Banshee (which is engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the Reckoners, who have infected her with Ghost Rock) where they may be finally and forever destroyed. In order to aid her, Banshee creates Guardians: a kind of Harrowed empowered by the planet to do good rather than inhabited by a demon bent on evil. This switch encapsulates what makes *Lost Colony* different from the first two of the *Deadlands* settings. In *Deadlands* and *Hell on Earth*, heroes fight to redeem a world that had fallen. In *Lost Colony*, they fight to preserve a world from the dual threat of the Reckoners and the Skinnies -- a race of evil sorcerers from a destroyed planet in the Faraway system.

If this major plotline were not enough, there are a host of major players to provide foils for almost every PC. Hellstrom Industries is headed up by the demon-possessed Vanessa Hellstromme -- the late wife of Dr. Darius Hellstromme -- whom he rescued from the Hunting Grounds. She developed the Mute technology and can spy on the entire system through the nanobots. She is watching and waiting to see what becomes of the Reckoners, waiting to determine if it is more advantageous to side with them or aid in their defeat. UN General Warfield continues to believe that the only good Anouk is a dead Anouk, and is regrouping his forces to continue the stalled war against them. A group of pseudo-socialist thugs and bandits called the Reavers terrorize the world in an attempt to bring about their dark version of utopia.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Does this shift in vision work? Is it enough to challenge the expectations of a gaming group already familiar with the *Deadlands* formulae? The answer is a tentative yes. *Lost Colony* suffers from the inherent problems of the third chapter of a three-chapter story, in that it lacks the punch of the introduction. If you go into *Lost Colony* with the expectation of finding another *Deadlands*, you are going to be disappointed. If you go into it expecting the third part of a three-part story, then you will probably enjoy what you find. In terms of gaming, the success of the change in view will ultimately depend far more on the Marshal than the material. Hopley gives Marshals enough rope to hang themselves with in *Lost Colony*, letting the players adapt the game style to their own tastes. Perhaps it is because of this that the feel is somewhat hit or miss. Because there is no shortage of choices, some of the options are going to feel unappealing while others are exciting. In terms of game support, since it continues from and requires *Hell on Earth*, there is no shortage of already existing supplementary material. A handful of supplements are rumored to be in the works, and *Lost Colony* will be featured in upcoming issues of the *Epitaph*.

In the final analysis, those considering *Lost Colony* should decide if they have liked Pinnacle's prior settings. If they have, they will likely enjoy this one as well. If they do not, they should probably spend their hard-earned dollars elsewhere.

--*Matthew M. DeForrest*

Pyramid Review

Are You A Werewolf?

Written & Published by [Looney Labs](#)

Illustrated by Alison

16 cards, six-page rules booklet; \$4

Are You A Werewolf? is not a question that you are going to be asked all that often . . . unless of course, you just happen to live in a village beset by the nightly predation of the lycanthropic kind, which happens to be the setting for the latest game from Looney Labs, the publisher best known for award-winning titles such as *Fluxx*, *Chrononauts*, and *Icehouse*, as well as *Cosmic Coasters*. *Are You A Werewolf?* is a micro game for lots of players that involves a lot of finger-pointing, the opening and shutting of eyes on a regular basis, the repeated reading of a litany, the rending of a villager limb from limb, a little negotiation, and then the jolly lynching of an innocent victim or (if the village gets lucky) a werewolf.

This is not really a new game, but a variation upon a card game called "Mafia," a history of which, and expanded rules for which can be found at <http://www.eblong.com/zarf/werewolf.html>. Further the actual rules for this game are included on the Looney Labs [website](#). As to the physical game itself, *Are You A Werewolf?* comes in a small ziplock bag, which contains:

- A six-page rules leaflet that doubles as the game's front and back cover, so that the rules run to a grand total of four pages
- A set of 16 black-and-white cards consisting of one Moderator, one Seer, two Werewolf, and 12 villager cards, printed on a light glossy card stock

As opposed to many micro-games, which require relatively few players, *Are You A Werewolf?* needs quite a lot -- a minimum of eight and a maximum of 15. Once this number has been assembled, the deck is shuffled and each player receives a single card. This is kept secret, until the card is revealed upon their death within the game, either by being slashed up by one of the werewolves or lynched by an enraged mob of villagers. The Moderator can be determined beforehand, or dealt out at the game's beginning. Their role is to make sure that the game's paranoia, deception and lynching runs smoothly.

The game runs on a series of day and night phases, with the Moderator reading aloud a simple script included in the rules. On a night phase, everyone begins with his eyes closed. First, the two werewolves are told to open theirs, and they silently agree upon and indicate who will be that night's victim by pointing their fingers. That victim will turn up dead in the morning and is now out of the game. The werewolves close their eyes and the Seer is told to open his or hers. The Seer is allowed to point to one other villager, and the Moderator silently indicates whether or not that villager is one of the two werewolves. The Seer then closes his eyes and the night phase is now over.

At the beginning of the day phase, everyone wakes to discover the dead and slashed corpse of the villager. The first thing that they want is bloody justice, and it doesn't matter if that justice is enacted upon a villager or a werewolf! The surviving villagers must come to a majority decision as to who this must be, and the chosen one gets a lynching. Prior to being strung up, the victim reveals the details of his card, and he is then out of the game.

This process is repeated again and again until either both werewolves are dead or the number of surviving werewolves and villagers is equal. At this point, the lycanthropes can easily overpower the remaining villagers and kill them in the open and without resorting to further secrecy. Whatever the result, all surviving players at this point are declared to be

Pyramid Review: Are You A Werewolf



the winners. The tactics to *Are You A Werewolf?* are quite simple; the werewolves need to find the Seer before she or he can identify them, whereas the Seer must work out who the lycanthropes are without giving themselves away to the werewolves and thus become their next victim. As to the villagers, they just need to huddle together in fear and hope that they can survive . . .

Are You A Werewolf? really is as simple as that. Yet as with other games similar to this, the fun comes not just in playing as it is written, but really more in what the participants bring to it. The game is ripe with opportunities to roleplay, but given the subject matter, the style of roleplaying should not be serious at all. Instead it needs to be played for the cheese-and-ham factor. The rules suggest that the players take on impromptu roles of positions within the village, such as the mayor, local priest, or circuit judge, but players will no doubt create their own. Even if these roles are not updated, players should at least adopt their favorite local yokel accent. The illustrations on the cards suggest the use of the classic "Mummerset" accent, but any Hillbilly, Redneck, Transylvanian, or Canadian twang would do just as well.

This still leaves the problem of finding all of the necessary players (or is that victims?) for a game of *Are You A Werewolf?* Eight can sometimes be difficult to assemble, let alone the maximum number of fifteen. Yet with the requisite number, the game would work very well as a Halloween party game or as a pre-LARP appetizer for those times when the GM is not quite ready. And with a little reworking, the game mechanics (such as they are) could easily be adjusted to other themes -- witch-hunt, communist, or the like. In the meantime, let the paranoia, deception and mob rule!

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game Director's Screen

Published by [Eden Studios](#)

Written by Paul Chapman

Edited by M. Alexander Jurkat

Additional Writing by M. Alexander Jurkat

Art Direction and Layout by George Vasilakos

Interior Illustration by Ginger Kubic

4-panel screen with full color photos, 56-page black and white booklet; \$20.00

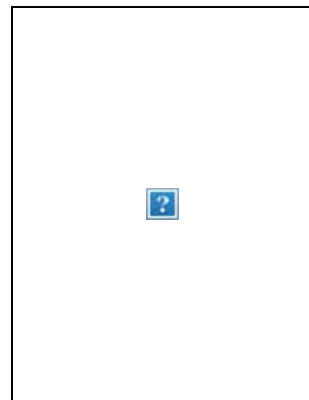
Gamemaster screens are something of a ritual for game companies. Usually it's the first release following the main rulebook, and for Eden Studios Inc.'s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game*, readers would ask for no less than a ritual. In some ways *Eden's Director's Screen* benefits from this custom, and in some ways it doesn't.

The screen itself is fine, but there's not much gushing to be done about it. It's a four-panel affair and it stands up solidly, but the material used to make it could have been slightly heavier stock. Instead of folding it end over end so it forms a semi-circle when opened, they've gone for an accordion arrangement -- better for keeping it from falling over toward the players, but harder to keep the sides from pulling together toward the center and revealing all your secrets. The semi-circle is more of a jagged line, so hopefully the gaming table is fairly tapered at the GM's end.

It's always a conundrum what to put on the players' side of the screen -- occasionally someone puts a few player-oriented tables there -- but the producers have gone the graphic route. Photo images of Buffy and her pals grace the panels, and the atmosphere of the pictures is nicely fitted to the mood of the game.

The GM's side is about what you'd expect -- charts in easy-to-access format. The tables in the back of the *Core Rulebook* have been grouped together in a fairly intuitive arrangement. All your combat maneuvers, the actions, and turn orders are on the right; creepy stuff like spells, panic, and fear tests are on the left; and in the middle, a summation of combat gear, drama, injury, and a rule cheat sheet. Having the ranged attacks on the left away from the combat section is a bit odd, but such are the vagaries of layout. The shading on the charts and tables is a tad dark, but it's not burdensome to read and everything is laid out clearly.

In keeping with tradition, this one includes some text. It comes with a booklet, split into two parts. The first is the Director's Handbook, which is some additional information on running a successful *Buffy* game. Most of it is stuff readers have probably seen in other how-to GM tutorials: engaging players using all five senses, not letting rules and rolls ruin the drama, and adding props and ambiance. There are some dandy sections on building the mystery, working big secrets into the game, and keeping players involved in the action no matter their PC's power level. This is balanced out by bits of awkward writing and the puzzling inclusion of a section on what a GM's screen is and how to use it (it is possible someone needs it).



The second part of the booklet is Episodes, a trio of adventure ideas . . .

[SPOILER ALERT!]

. . . that builds on the Core Rulebook's use of the Djinn as the season's Big Bad. When Giants Clash has the Scoobies chasing down a pair of vampires whose wishes have put them in charge of their own bloodsucking gangs and started a turf war. All A-Buzz releases a demonic bug with a need for spinal fluid to feed its young. Finally, The Bricklayer brings a mysterious man named Taylor to town, a stranger who eschews the party's assistance as he tries to reset the walls of the Djinn's prison. The first episode reads like filler while the second is a good piece that allows investigation and Scooby ingenuity to save the day. The third is an ambitious piece that unfortunately asks the GM to dance a precarious little jig trying to keep the PCs guessing.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The back of the booklet contains a copy of the player character record and quick sheets, suitable for photocopying (and more accessible than the ones in the hardbound rules). Some nice, original artwork with a dramatic flair rounds out the package.

Eden Studios' *Director's Screen* is a functional tool. The booklet isn't a complete loss, but it runs lukewarm and cool and the product wouldn't suffer much for its exclusion. Leaving out the text would presumably have lowered the price tag, but if the cost-to-materials ratio was a sticking point for sales, sturdier stock for the shield itself might have been the answer. The screen keeps up a beloved, often necessary roleplaying institution, but the tired attempt to make it more than it needs to be is what ends up costing it - and the customer -- a bit more than it needs to.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Where Would I Be Without IBM?

Okay; you're looking to establish an otherworldly feeling for a campaign world, or your character. ("No, I'm not! I'm trying to get these grass stains out of my kilt!" you say. Well, hush. Play along, or I'll turn this column around and take us home *right* now . . .)

Now, many folks, when trying to establish alternate worlds, go for the Big Things: multiple moons, continent-spanning supercomputers, totalitarian omnipresent governments, flying cars, friendly cats . . . really unbelievable bits.

But sometimes the most changing events are those that become so ubiquitous, we don't even consider them anymore to *be* innovations; they have always been such.

Velcro. Post-It Notes. Home printers. None of these existed 60 years ago (and have only been reasonably common in the past 20 years), yet have become such a part of our world that it's difficult to envision life without these things. Air conditioning has been called the single most society-altering invention of the 20th century, changing how we gather and interact as a culture.

Many of these innovations relate to entertainment and leisure pursuits; the idea of being able to watch a beloved movie on demand, for example, only came about with the event of the affordable VCR in the 1980s. (The notion of having a reasonable recreation of the movie experience is even newer, either dating to DVD or -- if you're feeling generous -- to the laserdisc format.) Likewise, music has only been reproducible for just over 100 years, and has only sounded *good* for a few decades! (The CD also introduced another idea previously unknown to home users: the "shuffle" mode. Nonlinear music listening -- especially across multiple albums -- was previously unknown outside of jukeboxes.) Other innovations tie to safety and protection; seatbelts were invented in 1959, and became (reasonably) common in the 1960s. Still others relate to knowledge and investigation; fingerprints are so common they're cliché, and DNA evidence seems to be moving toward that level of acceptance.

So if you're trying to *really* make a world feel different, consider either removing something that we consider to be a fixture of life, or adding something that we *don't* have (yet).

Credit cards -- Credit cards were invented in 1951, although they didn't become feasible until the development of the magnetic strip in the 1970s. But the very notion of credit cards -- getting product from a stranger in exchange for a plastic card . . . and you get back the card! -- is a fairly radical notion. It wouldn't take much to set this concept back decades (or remove the possibility entirely); perhaps the government viewed such flexible interest rates as usury, and took steps to outlaw them. Perhaps an early high-profile credit card fraud ring -- where the banks were burned for many millions of dollars -- made them skittish about credit cards, and phased them out shortly after their introduction.

Anyway, a world without credit cards would be a vastly different one. Credit cards led directly to ATMs and ATM cards (another fixture of modern life . . . remember when you needed to plan ahead to make sure you withdrew enough cash for the week from the bank?), and made the e-commerce boom of the 1990s possible. (Whether or not that's a good thing will be left for future generations to decide.) A world without credit cards would be very different. Most people would need to carry around larger quantities of cash and/or checks (a form of payment which is rapidly becoming part of the "Do you remember when . . .?" past). Many transactions would be much less traceable for law enforcement communities. And a *lot* of people's lives would be very different; they wouldn't have as much kewl stuff, but they also wouldn't have the specter of crushing debt hovering above them.

Calculators -- Ironically, with the advent of commonplace computers, the standard electronic pocket calculator has become somewhat rare. The first ones were invented in 1972 (back when they had those red LEDs for display instead of the liquid crystal LCDs). They arguably paved the way for a number of innovations; the notion of carrying out fairly complex computations portably became feasible as a result of that invention. (It was also an early commercial application of transistors and other miniaturization technologies.) More importantly, that electronic calculator paved the way for other portable electronic devices; arguably, it also helped establish these portable devices as existing for useful purposes. In comparison, if the first handheld electronic LED device was, say, Football (introduced in 1978),

then more "serious" applications of this new technology may be delayed or forestalled entirely . . . much the same way there is a wide gulf between home video game systems and home computer systems (despite the incredibly similar underlying technological architecture) On the other hand, if the digital calculator were introduced a decade or two earlier (almost feasible, since the transistor was invented in 1948), history could have taken a very different path. In particular, the Cold War may have taken a very different path, as the "educational war" may have centered around technological and economical advantages, where the United States had the edge ("A free calculator for every student!").

Hamsters -- Hamsters were first used as research animals in 1930, and were brought to the United States in 1938. The radically altered nightmare world we would be living in without these creatures can scarcely be imagined. (Okay; maybe not . . .)

If you're looking for more ideas, most world almanacs have an "inventions" section, which is a listing of many innovations and the year they were invented. Of course, the gulf between invention and public availability is often wide, and you'll generally need to do more research; microwave ovens were invented in 1947, for example, but the first home model wasn't introduced until 1967, and their popularity didn't become truly phenomenal until in 1984. (If you're using invention charts, you'll also need to scratch your head at some entries; the compact disc was invented in 1972, for example, while the compact disc *player* was invented in 1979. "We have this wonderful new music storage format!" "Wonderful! Show me how it works!" "Umm . . . you'll have to give me a few years . . .")

Within a week or two I'll take a look at the other side of this one: What happens when something *else* becomes as omnipresent as other aspects of our life? (I'm not sure if it'll be next week, or if my scheduled annual visitation by those four ghosts will inspire me to make a holiday-themed column for next week.)

Until then, do *not* stick credit cards or hamsters in a microwave, no matter *how* much a part of life they are.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer (to a question posted late last week): **In the Belly of the Beast** (for the **d20 System**)*

(One star) "Nothing can reach its potential until taken out of hiding, and light in dark places robs the shadows of their rest. Litheroy and his servants see to it that nothing remains hidden."

Waging The Battle Royal

Roleplaying Low-Tech Battles

by Volker Bach

The heroes are there; after long, arduous campaigning, the final clash between the forces of light and darkness is at hand. Or they got themselves drafted into the army. Or maybe made very powerful enemies. At any rate, a battle looms, and you break out the Mass Combat System of choice, hexgrids and unit counters. Troops are laid out on a chessboard terrain, ready to clash at the roll of the dice. The fate of the world (or, at any rate, your characters) is decided with calculator and measuring tape over a tabletop. Roleplaying returns to its wargaming roots.

Of course, if you like it that way, there's nothing to stop you from playing the engagement in good old wargaming style. Let the GM and player set the counters or miniatures, roll the dice, and trust to luck, skill, and cunning. But for many, this resolution is a letdown. The wargaming style lacks emotional involvement; after harrowing adventures testing the limits of their characters in any way conceivable, they balk at having the heroes sidelined in favor of what amounts to a tabletop game. They want to be there, in character, not as the mathematical fraction of a troop strength figure. Well, that's what *roleplaying* is all about, and for those GMs about to try it, here are a few helping hints to make your next battle a memorable experience.

A Grunt's Eye View

Most wargames and war movies present battles as a clash of units deployed according to a commander's orders, moving across the field like chess pieces under the watchful eye of their leaders. Rows of men and horses are usually seen from above, the territory laid out like a map, neat and orderly. Very few people ever saw a battle like that, even when aircraft or helicopters were around, and there is no reason why the players should. Presenting the battle as the grunt sees it gives the GM more control over events (which is not necessarily a bad thing; many GMs don't want the climactic battle between good and evil to be won by evil simply because a player rolled a critical failure.) More importantly, it makes for much more tense, emotional roleplay.

The battlefield on which low-tech armies met were often small enough for a single person to take in, but rarely anything like the flat, smooth surfaces we see in films or games. Gullies, ditches, hills, hedges, trees, scrub, and buildings block the view even for troops that are not otherwise occupied. Most soldiers see little more than the back of their comrade's helmet or a narrow stretch of land. The events of the battle at large are unknown to them, at least until they meet fleeing friends or attacking enemies. As far as they are concerned, they win or lose on their small patch and hope that their comrades do as well on theirs. Communication is tenuous, and a body of men that is broken may well come to believe the whole battle lost and flood back in disorder, taking other troops with it. It is easy enough to deplore this, but imagine yourself faced with your friends running, shouting that the day is lost -- do you run or do you stay? What if they are wrong and you're leaving your comrades in the lurch? What if they are right and standing your ground would mean suicide? This kind of dilemma can be fun to play out.

The problem of communicating can be played out in detail. Before radio, the means were limited. Musical signals (from bugles or trumpets) were often varied and complex, but also hard to hear over the din and easily misinterpreted. For whom is the call to advance? Is it the enemy's bugler playing or our own? Adding extra signals to identify the intended recipient unit of the command (as was done at times) only increases the complexity. Flags are good for locating units, but not very useful for sending any kind of signal other than surrender. Having the banner retreat or fall could be a highly demoralizing sight, which is why killing the bearer was so effective and the capture of enemy standards so significant. (Roman commanders are said to have deliberately thrown their troops standards into enemy lines, forcing the men to recover them by attacking). Messengers -- runners for nearby units, horsemen from farther away -- often know little more than the commands they are to bring, and may even have misunderstood them. Thus, especially at decisive moments, soldiers may be left with little knowledge or, worse, conflicting reports on which to

base their decisions.

View from a Hill

Having the PCs in command changes things a little, but it doesn't make them any less interesting. Without a convenient treeless hill or tower on hand, the commanders of low-tech armies depend on reports from messengers and signalers. On larger battlefields, this can mean time lags of hours before important news reach them (if they do at all -- intercepting and killing messengers may not be gentlemanly, but it *is* effective). The shortcomings of communication are an even more acute problem for them. To let your players have a taste of this, give them a map as complete or incomplete as you think fit, then have information trickle in piecemeal (roll dice for every piece to see whether it gets through). They ordered the spearmen to deploy in the copse -- did they? Are they still there? Did the left wing hold out? Officers were sometimes surprised by advancing enemy cavalry while still waiting for news from the field.

Even when they have a view of the whole field (more often they will have at best part of it in sight) that doesn't mean they will have a clear picture of what is going on. Uniforms (if any) are hard to make out at a distance, and whether the men approaching in the midst of a dust cloud are messengers bringing news of victory or enemy horsemen intent on capturing them may not be clear for quite some time. It takes a good eye and some luck to evaluate properly what is going on. Frequent rolls for perception and a lot of guessing can keep commanders on their toes. Running a battle is not easy, and having the nerve not to panic when kept in the dark, and to trust your subordinates to succeed even when you are not there to look over their shoulders, is no mean part of it.

Before the Battle

A battle is usually the climactic event of a campaign or adventure, so there is something to be said for working up to it. Depending on your favored style, this part can focus on the military preparations (it is amazing how much fun players will have laying out palisades, ditches, and mantraps) or on deep soul-searching on the eve of battle (you could do worse than look to Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Act 4, Scene 1 for inspiration). Before a battle, the thoughts of people tend to reflect on their mortality. Even hardened soldiers who will wade into the melee with never a second thought often find it hard to bear the waiting, darkness, and uncertainty of the night before the clash. Men huddle around the campfires, talking and laughing to stave off the silence, drinking to push away their fears. Many battles were lost in this hour, with gloomy pessimism spreading among the troops. Players who are into that kind of thing may well find it their characters' greatest challenge to talk up the spirits of the troops.

If the PCs are among the army's leaders, the preparations for battle may become even more taxing. There is never only one approach, or only one solution to a problem. Disagreement over the best deployment -- the best tactics, even whether the battle should be fought at *all* -- will be rife. Keep in mind that many decisions in war were made by committee. Being outvoted and ordered to follow a strategy they believe to be unsound, or being left to agonize over whether the other party wasn't right after all, can be the source of hours of fun.

If you have the time and are looking for extra excitement, you can play out scouting the battlefield. As late as the 19th century (and later, in some cases), maps were rare and inexact. Terrain features as insignificant as a ditch or fence could halt the advance of infantry or break up a cavalry charge. If one party had the field to itself, even if only for a few hours, pits and stakes could be installed. Knowing about these could be vital, and scouts were usually sent out by prudent commanders. Skulking about a nocturnal battlefield is dangerous, though, and armies of the past were untrammelled by the Geneva Convention when dealing with captives, especially if they were thought to have useful knowledge that could be extracted. From the leaders' point of view, incomplete and contradictory reports trickling in with mind-wrecking slowness can further complicate tactical decisions. A session of "scouting" can make a good introduction to the final battle, introducing the players to the lay of the land and giving them an extra opportunity to shine (or to foul up things).

Taking Position

The morning the battle starts (and it usually does start in the morning -- night attacks were far too risky for most armies) can be the next step in building up tension. Any battle worthy of the name will be fought by large numbers of men, and getting an army into positions across a field that can measure several miles usually takes hours. Tired troops stumble over irregular ground through thinning morning mist, cursing under their breath. Muttered oaths and shouted commands are interspersed with the occasional pep talk given by officers. The air is full of noise -- marching bodies of men make a sound quite unlike anything else, a low clattering hum that carries for miles and is very hard to locate. On a wide or broken battleground, whole armies may have no more evidence of each others' existence than this noise. Describe it!

Once in position, the waiting begins. If you are lucky, you will be able to see the battle progressing. If not, the only way to find out how the battle turns will be to listen. The clatter of marching men, the rumble of cavalry attacks, battlecries drifting over the field, and the rising dust and perhaps smoke may guide them. Leaders may even be given reports every now and then, but in the absence of radio or magical communication these will be few and old. Nerves fray as soldiers speculate about the turn of events. Rumors of defeat spread like wildfire, and sometimes whole units flee the field at the noise of attacking cavalry or the sight of a dust cloud. Commanders yell, curse, plead and cajole to keep their men in line. And then the enemy comes in sight.

Of course, if you do not want to give them that time but rather spring the battle on them from sudden ambush (the way Felix lost his legion on the retreat from Jerusalem) building up the atmosphere is harder. You can start it on a "You get up in the morning and march for three hours when suddenly . . ." note, but that is often disappointing. If you are in the habit of slipping in flavor text anyway (spending a few minutes every now and then telling the players how their characters go about their daily routines, visit markets, walk around strange cities, and so on), this is a good time for it. Spin a little yarn about the sights and sounds of breaking camp, the army on the march, shooting the breeze with comrades in your file. The trick is not to let the players notice you are leading up to something.

A Clash of Arms

It may be hard to reconcile with the conditioning of hundreds of war movies, but in fact hardly anybody likes combat. GMs may feel free to ignore this, especially if they are running a cinematic campaign or field elite units, but in any historical battle, reluctance to come to grips played a role. Men hold back from the fray, instinctively drawn to the protection of walls, hedges, or ditches . . . sometimes refusing outright to move out. Weapons are gripped tighter to stop the hands from trembling, lips bitten bloody to keep the teeth still, voices waver shrilly as commands are shouted. The atmosphere of a unit expecting battle is dominated by fear more often than not, especially when the troops are inexperienced.

Armies have found ways around the natural tendency to turn tail, ranging from pride to fear to drugs. It is surprising how many assaults were carried by soldiers so deep in their cups they simply didn't notice they ought to be scared. Imagine the attack of a horde of men, stumbling, yelling and staggering on, wildly waving their weapons about (no, it's not funny when you're at the receiving end). Pride is at least as potent a drug. Elite formations are taught to feel contempt for the enemy, and will take great risks on the assumption that mere rank-and-file could never pose a threat. This kind of attitude could backfire badly, as it did for the Spartans at Leuktra or the French knights at Crecy, but more often it carried the day. There are few things more unnerving than being attacked by men who seem unafraid of dying.

Most soldiers on the low-tech battlefield get much of their courage from banding together. Infantry stand shoulder to shoulder, cavalry charge knee to knee. The close ranks of comrades strengthen the individual's resolve to stand and fight, not to mention that a deep formation puts something in the way of front rank men trying to run. This doesn't work with just anyone, though. Friends, neighbors, compatriots, or drinking companions are needed to make a body of men cling together and create an atmosphere where leaving your comrades behind is literally worse than dying. A body of men like this gains a kind of communal will that strengthens (or weakens) the individual in it -- even fearful men will be driven to attack in a confident mass, but when panic sets in, the contagion is equally unstoppable. Losing contact with your unit, if only by a few yards, should definitely require a morale roll, especially for infantry.

When a clash is imminent, soldiers need to build up their courage to it. One way this could be done was by shouting.

In many ways a low-tech battle must have looked more like a modern riot than a modern war, with tight groups of people rhythmically yelling at each other before attacking. Battlecries can serve to identify troops (though once the fighting begins the shouts are liable to become incoherent). In some parts of the world they could become part of martial tradition, from the improbably measured Greek *Alalalai* to the shrill, piercing rebel yell and the bowel-churning *Uuuuu-Raaaah* of Russian infantry. Some songs, too, are part of local martial lore and soldiers seem to have infinite capacity to invent their own lyrics to these, usually obscene, chauvinistic, bloodthirsty or otherwise unprintable. If you don't have to worry about disturbing your neighbors, simulating this atmosphere for your players can add to the experience a great deal (if it doesn't make you feel silly, that is). A session can even degenerate into a shouting match for a few minutes when everyone gets in on the fun, which will get the adrenaline pumping as it should. Just make sure that you don't end up with the police on your doorstep.

When troops clash, victory or defeat are often decided in a matter of seconds -- usually before the actual contact. This is especially pronounced with heavy cavalry charges. It was usually either the infantry that broke before impact or the charging horsemen that stopped or veered away. On more than one occasion, cavalry gradually slowed to a full stop, losing heart in the face of an unmoving wall of spears. Infantry, too, occasionally broke before the clash -- the Greeks knew this as a tearless battle, when the losing side turned and ran before coming to blows. Part of this has to do with reputation. Once troops earn a reputation for being invincible, this increasingly becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (if everybody knows you cannot beat the Swiss or the Spartans, nobody is really going to try). This reputation also comes with the conditions of the moment, a good pep talk or warm breakfast, a rumor of defeat, a front-rank man slipping and falling, a popular officer leading the way, or an unpopular one commanding from the rear. This is the time for PC leadership to shine. Keeping up their men's relentless press in the face of the enemy, holding the line against the charge of heavy horse or pushing on through a withering hail of arrows can be more of a challenge than defeating a champion in single combat (though there's no reason why the heroes shouldn't have the chance to do both).

In the midst of battle, one-on-one fighting in the traditional heroic manner is scarce. Conveying the confused press of bodies, the milling crowds locked in mortal combat, works better in vignettes. Perhaps the best way is using a battle montage, describing in momentary flashes what goes on around the PCs, and occasionally turning to a player and asking him what he does. Don't follow up on the actions if you don't need to; "You feel your sword hit something and the enemy vanishes as one of your comrades pushes past you" is good enough for most purposes. And don't forget to describe some scenes that the players cannot intervene in. It shows them that there are other people making a difference, and you can use the technique to turn up the pressure. Players get very eager to intervene where you don't let them.

Of course, unless you players are very heavily focussed on roleplay they will want their characters to achieve something. This can be a specific mission -- taking or holding a position, capturing a flag or a certain person, or simply keeping a body of men from disintegrating -- or it could be something you throw at them as events unfold. Saving a comrade from death or capture, taking a high-ranking enemy, or stemming the tide of retreat and rallying the fleeing men for one more (successful) push are all good impromptu goals. If you have a particularly convoluted strategy in mind, their actions can even turn the tide of the whole battle. Whatever it is, they will be grateful to finally be influencing things.

Winning

Once the enemy ranks start giving way, something happens to the winning side. Seeing the back of a foe is an incredibly exhilarating experience, and the temptation to pursue is overwhelming (experienced tacticians know that; the feigned flight is a time-honored scheme to draw enemies out of strong positions). Men shout, push forward, begin to forge ahead mobilizing reserves of energy nobody would have thought they had. PCs finding themselves in the middle of it should be having a good time. If you have set the scene vividly, you won't even need to do much to ensure that. Make sure to describe the powerful release of pent-up fear as the dreaded moment comes -- and the other side breaks. The ensuing scenes are frenzied, soldiers killing enemies pleading for their lives, laughing dementedly, and often enough indulging in wanton destruction of whatever they could lay their hands on. Witnesses describe troops in this state as acting like drunks, which should give you a workable idea (think World Cup finals, but the hooligans are all armed). They are certainly dangerous to be around for anyone not part of the gang, including their allies and any

officer trying to keep a lid on things.

That kind of behavior brings problems. Even if the enemy's flight is genuine (which is not a given) there is no guarantee that there are no intact units in your path. Pursuing troops tend to get drawn out as individual soldiers take down their chosen targets; being scattered, overconfident, and high on adrenalin is no way to meet organized troops. Keeping a triumphant unit in hand, even in formation, isn't easy; in ancient Sparta breaking formation to pursue was a capital offense, which should give you some idea of the temptation to do so. At least, expect a lot of shouting and the odd Leadership check.

Given the patchy communications on the battlefield, there is no reason why the heroes should even know that they have won. Unless they actually fought a winning action, they might not hear of it for hours. This can be an interesting ploy if you want them to have other things to do (such as chucking a piece of jewelry into a handy crater to be greeted by victorious comrades when they had resigned themselves to captivity and death), but unless you have a good reason it can be a letdown.

Losing

It is not the thing players look forward to, but every now and then their characters may find themselves at the receiving end of a military reverse, be it just for their unit or the entire army. As with victory, there is a specific chemistry to defeat when it occurs in close-packed groups of men. It has less to do with being afraid than with being caught wrong-footed. No troops are immune (though, of course, veteran soldiers are less likely to break than raw recruits).

Often, the issue is decided before the troops even meet. Somehow, the men become convinced that they can not hold the line or sustain the advance. Describing this without being blatant takes skill, but can be very rewarding -- a wavering of speartips, a momentary hesitation before cheering, a tendency to hold back, the line slowing, keeping step with the hesitant, the first men turning, trying to jostle their way through the ranks, starting others running until the whole unit dissolves, leaving the party to either stand and die or join in the precipitous retreat.

If the troops are already in combat, the situation becomes more confused, if only because the PCs will have less time to watch the men beside them. In cavalry engagements, the question is usually quite straightforward: The side that first starts running in larger numbers loses. Troops in tight formation are kept in line more easily by the press of rear-rank men (usually veteran soldiers, and at times under orders to kill the first man to turn and run), but once they do break it is usually final. A formation unravels from the rear or flank, from those men not engaged in combat. Heroes finding themselves there will have their hands full wrestling them back in line -- though if you think the style can take it, enforcing Will rolls and having them run can make for some interesting character roleplay (don't try this on players unless you absolutely know they can deal with it!). Again, shouting, chaos, and confusion is in order, and the players should not know at the time how the battle is going. If they did, the decision would be so much less interesting. Running is pointless if you're winning and justifiable if you're going to lose anyway.

Whether willingly or not, whenever PCs are caught in a retreat they should know (or very quickly realize) that it is dangerous. Troops trying to escape are demoralized, prone to panic, losing cohesion, and even throwing away their weapons and armor in a desperate effort to get away. Mixed with the usual state of mind of pursuing troops, this is when casualties are heaviest, which in turn exacerbates the panic. It is also where any PC, no matter what his rank or status, can shine by rallying the beaten forces into another stand. A time-honored tactic is grabbing a banner or standard . . . though yelling, pushing, and kicking also work. Once a formation stands, soldiers will accumulate seeking the safety of comrades. At worst, pursuers will hesitate to grapple with determined men, and with luck they could turn the tide of the engagement.

Aftermath

The end of a battle takes time. Like its beginning, it unfolds rather than occurring with a sudden flash. It may not even be clear initially who won (not all battles take place on a flat plain overlooked by two convenient hills, after all). Even if the situation seems resolved, surprises are still possible. In antiquity and the Middle Ages, the victor was the side

that took possession of the battlefield at the end of the day -- which made for a clear result, but also allowed a beaten army to regroup and hit a confident and careless enemy at night.

The winning army usually spent the night on the battlefield sorting itself out. There were wounded to be cared for, for one thing (its own -- enemy wounded were usually killed except if they promised ransom or valuable information). Some armies offered a regular medical service of sorts, while in others the wounded were left to the care of their comrades or the free enterprise system (scraping together enough loot to pay a freelance doctor for the treatment of a stricken comrade makes for an unusual kind of adventure). Reality tended to be quite grim, with the weakening cries of wounded lasting through the night, punctuated by the screams of enemies dispatched; again, here it is important to find out how much gore your players can stomach.

Looting, too, took place after a victory. The enemy dead and wounded were robbed of their weapons, armor, valuables, and even clothing; riderless horses rounded up, and whatever tents or huts the enemy left behind ruthlessly plundered. In the event of a large, rich camp being taken, this could be dangerous to the discipline of the winners (though very lucrative; the Burgundian loot taken by the Swiss in 1476 became legend). Some battles turned because overconfident troops began looting before the enemy was quite beaten. Prisoners were stripped of their arms and valuables and queried as to how much ransom could be hoped for. PCs might be quite gratified to realize that they netted a big fish, though they might equally find their claim to a captive challenged (rightly or wrongly). Sometimes, captives were auctioned at a discount to people who had the facilities to imprison them, too -- a memorable scene to play out.

The after-battle mood of a victorious army will mostly be determined by intense weariness, though. However exultant, apprehensive, or greedy they are, the fighters are most of all exhausted, both physically and emotionally. If the battle came across right, your players will be feeling something like that themselves. A warm, dry, clean place to sleep is definitely a priority (though one out of three may be good enough). For the leaders to restore discipline at this point can prove impossible, and wise commanders limit themselves to posting vedettes to guard against surprise attack. Winding down on this note makes a satisfying conclusion to a gaming session.

The losing army will find itself in an even less enviable situation. Even if they are not in immediate danger (pell-mell chases off the field were common, but sustained pursuit rarely took place), the defeat still leaves the fighters badly shaken, afraid, often unarmed, and alone or scattered in small groups. They have no way of knowing whether their handful is all that was left of their army. Alone, they are vulnerable to the revenge of the local populace (rarely fond of soldiers of any stripe) and marauding enemies. Slowing from a run to a walk, then weary slogging, they will meet up with comrades, maybe even commanders, slowly regrouping and regaining confidence. From fugitives seeking shelter where they can, they will turn back into an army, though a beaten one. Wise commanders will encamp in a protected location, rearm and drill their men, and try to rebuild their confidence (hard work for heroes, but worth playing out). Daring a new battle immediately would be foolish, but might be unavoidable if the enemy follows. The desperate defense of the retreating army's encampment or a narrow defile behind them can turn the tide of the war, or at the very least make for good poetry.

Further Reading

The experience of battle has been the focus of a few books recently, led by British military historian J. Keegan, whose *The Face of Battle* is still the best starting point. His later *History of Warfare* gives a more sweeping look at all aspects of combat, but does not offer the same atmospheric detail. For specific periods, V.D. Hanson has written a number of works on Greek battles (among them *Hoplites! The Ancient Greek Battle Experience*) while I. Goldsworthy looked at the legions of Rome in *The Roman Army at War*. As always, the military history books published by Osprey, especially their Warrior series, are an invaluable resource to roleplayers. Especially Warrior 9 *Late Roman Infantryman* by S. Macdowall and Warrior 49 *Landsknecht Soldier* by John Richards look at the experience of battle in detail. For those among you who read German, C. Stephan's *Das Handwerk des Kriegeres (The Craft of War)* offers interesting (if not always convincing) insights into military psychology.

Tri-Eye

A Voice from the Wilderness for Modern-Day *Call of Cthulhu/Delta Green*

by J. Edward Tremlett

"Some of you listeners might think I'm paranoid. Let me tell you -- perfect paranoia is perfect awareness. There IS an enemy out there. It IS out to get you. And now that you know about IT, it knows about YOU!

"So like it or not, you're part of the revolution now. The Machine knows that you know about it. And it will herd you if it can, and cull you like sheep if it can't. So are you going to get EMPed for nothing, or will you take some of its bastards out with you?"

Broadcasting in the dead spaces between stations in the hot, Los Angeles night, the pirate radio crank known as "Tri-Eye" works to expose the evil of The Machine. But is he really onto something, or is he just another deluded conspiracy theorist?

As an NPC with a rather . . . *interesting* way of looking at the world, Tri-Eye could be a real eye-opener for *Call of Cthulhu* or *Delta Green* investigators. He could also just be another nut in a world full of them, too. The Keeper can decide for himself which is true, and some ideas for Mythos crossover are also given.

Background

Joshua Clay Jackson was born in Los Angeles and brought up in San Pedro, the son of an industrial electronics salesman. Fat and unathletic, he found solace in science fiction and making his own electronic toys. He probably got that from his dad; They always said he got a lot from him. Josh's dad was a little weird. He was always looking over his shoulder in public. He wouldn't let anyone come into the workroom when he was in there; He had "secret projects" to make.

When Josh was 12, his father "went away." Two years later, his mother told him that there'd been an accident, and his father was dead. There was a funeral, but no one wanted to talk about what had happened. He was never told where his father had been, or how he'd died.

In spite of the tragedy, Josh went on with his life. He was accepted to Cal-Tech and started working on a Bachelors in Electrical Engineering. And then, towards the end of his senior year, he got the letter that changed everything.

An envelope was lying in his apartment's mailbox. It had no return address, and his address was typed on the front. It also had no stamps or postal markings of any kind.

Inside was a typewritten letter:

MR. JACKSON, JOSHUA CLAY:

WE KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU CAN DO.

GREAT REWARDS ARE GIVEN TO THOSE WHO CAN TEND TO
THE WORLD.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO WORK FOR US, SEND A POSTCARD
WITH YOUR RETURN ADDRESS ON IT, AND THE WORD "YES"

WRITTEN IN THE MESSAGE SPACE, TO THE ADDRESS ON THE
BACK OF THE ENVELOPE. PUT THE POSTCARD IN A PUBLIC
MAILBOX.

DESTROY THIS LETTER. TELL NO ONE ABOUT THIS.

There was no address on the back of the envelope, so he figured it was a stupid prank or pyramid scheme. All the same, he couldn't get the letter out of his head. There was something almost hypnotic about its simplicity, and he couldn't get "GREAT REWARDS ARE GIVEN TO THOSE WHO CAN TEND TO THE WORLD" out of his head.

A few days later, inspiration hit. He put the envelope an inch away from a naked lightbulb, and as the paper warmed, an address began to show up. It was a PO Box in Langley, Virginia.

So he got a postcard, wrote 'YES!!' on it, and sent it away the day before finals started. Grades came along, he graduated, and found a job working as an engineer for IBM. Before long he forgot about the letter, along with the rest of the junk mail offers he'd replied to and heard nothing more from.

A year after starting on the job, he started feeling like he was being followed. Black, nondescript cars were seen on his way to and from work. Fellows in black suits and sunglasses invariably appeared when he was out shopping. It was a bit unnerving, but he figured it was just coincidence; He'd read Robert Anton Wilson's stuff and found it boring.

But then the headaches started -- really bad headaches. His vision became peppered with distortions and his nose started bleeding. His doctor said they were migraines, and told him not to sit so close to his computer, but Josh knew it couldn't just be that.

And then, one night, he got a phone call.

"Jackson, Joshua Clay," a flat, crackly -- almost buzzing -- voice on the other side declared: "You were supposed to have reported for training."

"What?" Josh asked.

"Jackson, Joshua Clay. You were supposed to have reported for training."

Josh's blood ran cold. His heart skipped a beat.

"Okay . . ." he stammered: "What's going on here?"

There was a click on the other end, and the call was ended.

Josh hit *69, but, for some odd reason, the service didn't work. He called the operator to try and get the number, but the operator said Josh would have to talk to his supervisor, tomorrow between the hours of 9 and 5. . . . privacy and all that. Frustrated, John gave up for the evening, but planned to call the next day.

He never got the chance, though. The next morning his boss called him on the carpet for "improper use of company computers." Josh denied it, and yet, on his computer, there was a folder named "toys"; it was full of adult material. Josh protested that he'd never seen it before, but no one listened. And he was fired.

Three days after that he received an audit notice from the IRS. He'd always been careful about his taxes, but they had him for things he'd never even heard of; he wound up owing an amount that just happened to match his checking account balance.

And then, Josh came back to his apartment to find an eviction notice on his door. The building was going to be torn

down to make a Quickie-Mart. He had one month to comply.

No job. No money. No place to live . . . except with his mother. He sighed and flopped down in his easy chair, wondering why the world was crapping on him.

Just then, the phone rang.

"Jackson, Joshua Clay," said the same strange voice from before.

"Who the hell is this?" Josh demanded.

"Do you understand, now?"

"Understand what?"

"Do not pretend to be stupid, Mr. Jackson."

"You did this to me?"

"Those who will not tend the herd are either herded or culled. You have just been herded. Whether we cull you depends on one small thing."

Josh's heart froze in his chest: "W . . . wh-what?"

"Do you understand?"

"Yes . . ." he said, feeling as though he were being surrounded by great, invisible walls: "Yes . . . I . . . I think so . . ."

"Be certain, Mr. Jackson. There is so much more we can do. Do you require another demonstration?"

"No!" Josh screamed: "I'm . . . I'm certain! I understand! Just . . . please . . . stop it!"

"Good," the voice said: "Remember -- the Machine is everywhere."

The line went dead. Josh held the receiver in his hand, then dropped it. He sat there for a long time, alternating between wanting to cry and wanting to break something in utter, total rage.

While moving back into his mother's house, Josh pulled himself together. His father once told him that he should never let anyone push him around, no matter what. So he decided to research this "Machine," at least to find out why it had picked him.

His search took him to libraries' "occult" shelves, the paranormal potpourri sections of used bookstores, and the crazier lengths of the internet. He immersed himself in the works of Alex Constantine, Jeff Rense, Saucerwatch, Lyndon Larouche, Harlan Ellison . . . anyone and everyone who could tell him anything about what he was up against.

Before long a clear picture emerged. Crop circles, the men in black, the technology fetish of the modern world, flying saucers, religious cults, designer drugs, the Nazis -- they were all a part of some ancient, terrible plot to enslave the world under the will of something worse than the Devil, Himself.

And at the center of this web of manipulation was a mechanical demon, wired into the world and controlling the whole thing. It had a million ears, a million eyes. It could follow you everywhere through its cameras, TV screens, computer monitors and automated tollbooths. It was Gog. The Primal Difference Engine. The Avatar of the Telephone. The Tick-Tock Man. The Beast.

The Machine.

Josh knew he had to tell people. But how? Computers hooked up to the Internet were all a part of The Machine. Television was its main tool to keep the population under control. It even put secret marking numbers on photocopies . . .

A chance rewatching of *Pump Up the Volume* provided the answer. He knew how to do pirate radio, and figured it would be the best way to get the word out without being caught. Maybe someone would hear him, and maybe no one would . . . but he had to tell the world. He wasn't going to go down quietly. Not him.

So he got a job at a fast food place -- one that paid a workable wage, along with free food and a 401K plan. He got a cheap apartment in the sort of place where no one but the poor or crazy would live. He traded in his compact car for an old, beat-up, dark green van. He went to a few nondescript junk stores to buy cheap electronics, always paying cash and never visiting the same place twice.

Tri-Eye's first public broadcast was conducted from the back of his van a few miles from town. He's been an underground legend in the valley ever since. Hordes of conspiracy theorists, people in need of a good laugh and -- of course -- the FCC tune in every three days to see what Tri-Eye has to say.

It's been years since his first salvo against The Machine, and somehow he manages to stay one step ahead of its minions. But how long can his luck stay good?

Using Tri-Eye

Tri-Eye is a perfect aid and foil for Investigators in a modern-day, conspiratorial *Call of Cthulhu* game. If you need to slip your investigators a red herring, or give them a jumpstart, you can have them catch one of Tri-Eye's rants. He might also hear of their exploits, mistake them for the enemy, and expose them on the air.

An amusing *Delta Green* scenario could have the investigators allied with the FCC in their "day jobs" to try and catch him, only to find out that what he's saying has a lot to do with their last night at the opera.

They might also have cause to wonder how he's getting away with something like this for so long. Does Tri-Eye have a "guardian angel" in the FCC who keeps leading the investigation astray? And, if so, why?

Mythos Connections

How much Mythos knowledge Josh actually has is up to the Keeper to decide. He seems to have seen the surface edges of MJ-12, the Mi-Go, and the Karotechia, and extrapolated from there. But has he put enough pieces together to truly see the elephant for what it is, or is he just stumbling past the truth in favor of his delusions?

What happened to him -- provided it wasn't a delusion -- could be the work of the Mi-Go. They are well-known to experiment upon mankind, and both Josh and his father could have been regents in a long-term case study as to the fragile mental state of humans. Who -- or *what* -- spoke to Josh on the phone? What caused those headaches?

As for "The Machine" . . . remember that Nyarlathotep does have an avatar known as the Tick-Tock Man (*Creature Companion*, pp. 88-89). Is the Crawling Chaos playing another one of His sick games with mankind, using Josh as a playing piece? And, given the nature of one of Nyarlathotep's other avatars, can it be mere coincidence that Josh chose to call himself "Tri-Eye" . . . ?

Name: Joshua C. Jackson (aka: Tri-Eye)

Born: 1965 in Los Angeles, California

Age in 2002: 37

Occupation: Fry-slinger by day, pirate radio host by night

Degrees: Bachelors in Electrical Engineering from Cal-Tech.

STR 12 **DEX** 15 **INT** 16
CON 11 **APP** 11 **POW** 13
SIZ 14 **EDU** 19 **SAN** 35

HP: 12

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Skills: Bargain 40%, Chemistry 25%, Computer Use 60%, Conceal 50%, Credit Rating 20%, Cryptography 40%, Cthulhu Mythos (variable) Dodge 40%, Drive Auto 60%, Electrical Repair 70%, Electronics 60%, Hide 40%, Law 30%, Library Use 60%, Mechanical Repair 65%, Occult 55%, Persuade 20%, Photography 35%, Physics 50%, Trust No One 99%

Spells: None

Tomes Read: None (unless Alex Constantine's onto something after all . . . ?)

Weapons: Fist/Punch, 60%, 1d4 + db; Contact Taser, stun, 65%

Mental Disorders: Keeper's choice -- anything from justified paranoia (if he's right) to outright Schizophrenia (inherited from his father, no doubt)

Description: Josh looks about 25, with a flabby, zit-marked face and nervous, twitchy brown eyes. He's overweight and doesn't dress well for it, preferring to wear tight but nondescript t-shirts, a baggy hunting jacket and sweat pants. His brown hair is curly and unkempt, spilling out from beneath the LA Dodgers' baseball cap he always wears when he's not working -- even when asleep. The inside of the cap is lined with tin foil.

Items Carried: Wallet with no ID whatsoever, homemade taser, small radio for detecting "bugs," spare sheets of tin foil.

Income: \$15,000 a year from working at a fast-food restaurant.

Savings: \$5,000 in a trust fund his mother won't let him touch until he's married. Everything else is squandered on rent, burgers, tin foil and new equipment for his crusade.

Pyramid Review

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers Strategy Battle Game



Published by [Games Workshop](#)

Written by **Alessio Cavatore and Rick Priestley**

\$40

The Two Towers Strategy Battle Game is the second of at least three major releases in Games Workshop's miniature wargame based on the *Lord of the Rings* license. The boxed edition of the game comes with a rulebook, 32 unpainted plastic miniatures (12 Riders of Rohan and 20 Uruk-Hai warriors), dice, and a ruined building. In a nice touch, Games Workshop has designed the small cardboard flap that separates the contents as a ruler, meaning that the game can, with some assembling of the miniatures, be played straight out of the box. As with their earlier *Fellowship of the Ring* set, *The Two Towers* is an attractive, well designed game.

The rules themselves are an advancement of the earlier edition, rather than an entirely new set of rules, so owners of the prior release will find much in the book that they already have. Many of the problems and requests for clarification submitted by players of the previous game -- already addressed in issues of *White Dwarf* and on the Games Workshop web site -- have been incorporated into these rules. In this sense, this means that this edition of the rules supercedes the ones found in *The Fellowship of the Rings* set. Don't throw that earlier book away, however. *The Two Towers* updates the Heroes to their status in the second volume/film, meaning that if you want to refight any of the events prior to the breaking of the Fellowship, you will need the earlier book.

The new troop lists include a variety of new troop types and a handful of new Heroes. The Heroes and Villains of Helm's Deep make up the bulk of the new named figures, although Faramir, Gollum, and Treebeard are also present. New troop types include the Riders and Warriors of Rohan, the Rangers of Gondor, the Wild Men of Dunland, Uruk-Hai Berserkers, and Warg Riders. The presence and absence of other troop types may provide some spoilers for readers trying to anticipate what will happen in the next film. For those hoping for an early look, there are no pictures of either Treebeard or Gollum in the rulebook.

One oddity of Games Workshop's listing of the heroes is their choice to include Sauron in the new rules, but to remove Gil-Galad and Gwaihir from the troop list while maintaining Elrond and Boromir. As a result, the listing of heroes does not appear to have an immediately apparent consistency. While the inclusion Sauron is clearly necessary, as he was not included in the troop list for *The Fellowship of the Ring*, having a list of all the forces currently available (along with the earlier versions of the Heroes) with the print version of the rules would have been helpful, allowing players to use a single book for purchasing their forces. Even being placed on the Summary of Forces list in the back of the book, with a note referring to the *Fellowship* rules, would have made a difference.

The big addition to the book is the introduction of rules for cavalry and siege warfare. The cavalry rules remain consistent with the previously published mounted figure rules but are expanded, allowing players to fight swirling battles between the Riders of Rohan and Mordor's Warg Riders. The new siege rules are sufficiently general to cover the defenses from relatively lightly defended locations like Bree to the more imposing fortifications of Helm's Deep. Several scenarios allow players to refight scenes from the just-released film as either separate events or as a long, single battle. That being said, calling these siege rules is something of a misnomer. They are, more accurately, skirmish rules for fighting on and around battlements, and rules for destroying parts of fortifications. There are no rules for the reduction of defenders by starving them out; such rules are not really appropriate for *The Lord of the Rings* setting and are generally outside of the scope of any rule set that has a 1:1 figure to man ratio.

While *The Two Towers* expands the location and type of battle in reach of the players, the rules themselves remain internally consistent and relatively straightforward. If you liked *The Fellowship of the Rings* rules, you will like these. What also remains is the enforced roleplaying element placed on the forces of good. This does lead to some inconsistency with the film. For example, Legolas fires into combat to aid his friends regularly but is prohibited from doing so under the rules as they are written. Likewise, the High Elf archers wouldn't be able to fire from behind the rank of swordsmen, as depicted at the beginning of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Many of these inconsistencies can be handled by the judicious application of house rules or mutual understanding of what does and does not encompass blocking.

Another expansion comes in the section covering preparing figures and building terrain. The number of pages given to preparing, painting, and converting figures remains roughly the same, but the illustrations provided give a better sense of the process than in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The section on terrain has been expanded, giving useful advice on building both simple fortifications (a tower and a section of wall) and some rather advanced fortifications: in this case, a look at how the Games Workshop staff built the model of Helm's Deep found on the back cover of the book. Also included is a two-page spread on the finished model of Bree and a short paragraph on the materials and techniques used.

Even with the richly illustrated rulebook, the most exciting part of the boxed set are the miniatures. The sculptures continue to be of very high quality. They are well-posed and very realistic (well, as realistic as figures in a fantasy setting can be). The poses are active and convey a good sense of movement. This is especially clear in the *Heroes of Helm's Deep* boxed set (\$40), where the miniatures are remarkably good likenesses of the film's cast. Indeed, Games Workshop's miniatures line is ideal for use with Decipher's *Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Game*.

If Games Workshop's support of *The Fellowship of the Ring* is an indicator, players of the game and painters of the miniatures will be well-supported by the Game Workshop web site (although they should expect a certain delay, as much of the free information on the web site may initially appear in the pages of *White Dwarf*).

The *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers Strategy Battle Game* is a good buy for fans of the film interested in fighting in Tolkein's Middle Earth. Those just interested in collecting and painting figures may be better served buying the individual blisters and boxed sets to save some money, but might want to have the rulebook to aid them in painting the figures.

--Matthew M. DeForrest

Pyramid Review

Sid Meier's Civilization: The Boardgame

Published by [Eagle Games](#)

Designed by Glen Drover

Graphic Design by James Provenzale and Jacoby O'Connor

Illustrated by Paul E. Niemeyer

\$59.99

[Sid Meier's Civilization](#) is the kind of game that you come home to after a hard day at work and put on to relieve the day's stress with an hour or so of game play. Next thing you know, it is four o'clock in the morning and you are taking it all out on the Carthaginians or the French. The game is the classic "God" game for the personal computer, with untold numbers of players having enjoyed and continuing to enjoy, taking a small tribe of people from their first settlement through to the status of huge metropolises and the possible launching of a colony ship to Alpha Centauri. Civilization has seen three titles under that name, a sequel of sorts in [Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri](#) (also the subject of its own *GURPS* adaptation), and a rival computer game series in *Civilization: A Call to Power*. Of course, *Sid Meier's Civilization* was itself inspired by the classic boardgame of the same name, published by Avalon Hill among others. Now the intellectual property receives the board game treatment once again, but not one that is based upon the classic original published by Avalon Hill. Instead the new game from Eagle Games is based directly upon the classic computer game designed by Sid Meier.

With such titles as [War! Age of Imperialism](#), [The American Civil War](#), and [Napoleon in Europe](#), designer Glenn Drover has proven himself capable of creating games of no little scope and strategy. Each of these three came richly appointed with a box filled to the brim with playing pieces and other components. Thus Eagle Games are more than suited to handle a game whose concept takes the players through history itself, and some 53 technologies and 25 Wonders of the World. Unlike the computer game, *Sid Meier's Civilization: The Boardgame* is designed for two to six players, but their aim is still to lead their peoples through the ages, using diplomacy, military might, trade and technological research to advance and win. Victory can still be achieved through any one of those means, but a player must harness all four to become the world's most successful civilization. The riches to be found in the weighty box include:

- A 36-inch by 46-inch full-color board game
- Several hundred figures in 1/72nd or HO scale
- 53 Technology cards
- 25 Wonders of the World cards
- 61 square City cards
- 64 square City Improvement cards
- Three square Fertile indicator cards
- One Technology Flow Chart
- One Reference Card in black and white
- A set of four six-sided dice
- Two sets of die counters -- one representing the game's gold and the other its Exploration Markers
- A 32-page 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 11-inch full color rulebook in landscape format



While all of this fits into the box, a lot of preparation is required before any game can be played, as the soft plastic figures have to be taken off their sprues. Once done, the purchaser will need to provide a method of storage; considering the cost of this game, some ziplock bags could easily have been included. Also, once in play, the components take up a lot of space; the board is very large and the players will also need space for their pieces in and out of play as well as their city cards.

Sid Meier's Civilization: The Boardgame comes with two sets of rules -- the Standard Rules, and the Advanced, which build on the Standard. For the most part, the same components are used for both versions of the game, though the Advanced makes more use of the text upon the city, technology, and wonder cards. The rulebook is an attractive affair and for the most part, easy to read. What lets it down is that in many cases, the rules are not as clear and really require the reader to go through the given examples before they can be clearly understood, otherwise many of the game's smaller details may not be picked up on. This does not make it as easy to relate the rules to the other players, as it ought to be. The lack of an index and a certain amount of repetition between the Standard and Advanced Rules sets are not all that helpful either.

In other ways, the rules are nicely put together. At regular intervals the header of each page is used for the designer's "Civ. Notes," which are used to compare *Sid Meier's Civilization* and *Sid Meier's Civilization: The Boardgame*. These explain the decisions made in converting the former into the latter and act as an interesting set of Designer's Notes. At the end of the rulebook, Paul Niemeyer takes us on a tour of the artwork used to illustrate the board's edge, explaining their significance and source. Also, while the Reference Card is very useful -- with charts from the Standard Rules on one side and the Advanced Rules on the other, game play is slowed by the fact that just one is included in the box. Another would have been very useful and more usual in a game like this.

The board itself depicts a map of the Earth, divided into regions across which the players move their settlers and armies. At the beginning of the game, these are seeded with Exploration Markers that will be exposed as settler units move into the regions during play. Each player sets up two villagers -- these will grow to become towns, cities and finally metropolises -- and receives a swordsmen army to protect each, along with two settler pieces.

All of the playing pieces are molded in soft plastic, with settler, settlement, and flag-bearer miniatures done in the six player colors. The army pieces are all tan, and divided into infantry, cavalry, artillery and fleet units, with a specific figure for each era. Thus during the Ancient Era these are the Swordsman, Horseman, Catapult and Galley; the Man-at-Arms, Knight, Catapult and Caravel in the Medieval Era; the Musket Man, Dragoon, Cannon and Frigate in the Gunpowder/Industrial Era; and the Machinegunner, Tank, Howitzer, Battleship, plus the Fighter Plane in the Modern Era. Each piece is nicely detailed and to avoid having too many figures on the board, players substitute their armies with flag bearer pieces.

A turn consists of four phases -- Movement and Battles, Trade, Production and Purchase. All of the players must complete a phase before the starting player can move onto the next phase -- that is, all players must have moved and conducted any battles before anyone can do any trading. No means of indicating who is the starting player is included with the game, and the rules suggest using an eggcup or crown, but it would have been just as simple to have included a "Starting Player" card.

Movement is a simple affair; most units are only able to go so far as the adjacent region, while settlers are able to move two regions. More advanced Fleet units and Fighters can move greater distances. Should there be a face-down Exploration Marker in the region, a settler can turn it over. These may be resources -- wine, horses, gems, spices, oil, iron, coal, or rare metals -- or an event. This might be a free technology, treasure (which gives a player 10 extra gold), plagues that wipe out units and reduce settlements in size (they are also more virulent in later eras as communication improves), or a minor civilization. Unlike the computer game, in which the finding player automatically persuades the new civilization to join theirs, all players dice for it, with the rolls weighted in favor of the player with the least number of settlements. Exploration Markers can also turn out to be terrain -- desert, jungle or mountain -- which will limit the total possible growth of settlement in a region. Essentially, the Exploration Markers are the only random aspect to the game board. Those players looking to model the random maps generated prior to play in the computer game will have to wait until *Sid Meier's Civilization: The Boardgame* receives an expansion set.

Battles are conducted off the board with participants pitching their armies against each the others', unit by unit. The units are chosen in secret and then revealed, when the highest thrown on one or more of the dice decides the outcome. Better units and greater technology increase the number of dice to be thrown and give bonuses to the result. Combat is fast and simple.

Trade can be conducted between the players for cities, gold, military units, resources, settlers, technologies, and even wonders of the world. In particular, players will want to trade for temporary control of resources. This is important during the Production phase, as possessing control of resources greatly improves a civilization's income, which is mostly derived from the number and size of settlements along with said resources. The income can then be spent during the Purchase phase to buy new settlements -- this requires a settler unit to be in the region, which is then returned to player's hand; to upgrade existing settlements; to buy military units or technologies.

As with the computer game, technologies have requirements that must be fulfilled before they become available for purchase; these are clearly marked on both the Technology Tree and each of the attractively illustrated Technology Cards. Thus you cannot buy the Trade/Mapmaking technology without both of the Pottery/Specialization and Mathematics technologies being in play -- but players also do not have to buy every technology in the game. If one or more players have already bought the prerequisites for one technology, any player is free to spend out for the said new technology. Wonders of the World are not bought, but instead awarded when a player reaches a particular milestone, such as building a certain number of military units or settlements, or owning a certain number of technologies. An era ends and another starts when a player begins purchasing technologies from the new.

Neither Wonders nor the technologies have any real effect upon the game when playing just the Standard Rules, beyond adding to a player's score at the end of the game. For a short game this comes when the Medieval Era is completed or when the Modern Era is completed for the longer, more complete game. The Standard Rules play quite well and reasonably quickly, and like other Eagle Games, has the feel of *Risk*. That said, it places an emphasis upon the production and purchase of several factors -- settlements, settlements, military units, and technologies -- that come from the computer game, and thus imparts the board game with the sense that you are playing a form of *Sid Meier's Civilization*.

The Advanced Rules add a lot more depth, making for a longer and more complex game. It also requires a great deal more space, as not only is room required for the board and the Technology Tree, but also for the cards that represent each of their individual settlements, along with the improvements made to each city. This is so much space that in some ways each player almost requires a table to themselves to keep track of everything. This includes the size of all their cities, their resources and their happiness. This is indicated on each square city card with smiley faces on one side and sad ones on the reverse. Most cities are unhappy by default, but this can be rectified by purchasing Happiness Improvements -- such as the Temple, the Cathedral, the Hospital, and the Television Station for the Ancient, Medieval, Gunpowder/Industrial, and Modern eras respectively -- and assigning them to their cities. Likewise, Productivity Improvements, including the Library, the Bank, the Factory and the Highway System can also be bought and assigned to improve a city's output. An improvement last only as long as the era it comes from and it can only be bought once with improvements applying to the whole civilization, rather than to individual cities.

Technology also works differently, doing more than adding to a player's final score. First off, they cost more, but they also do much more in the game. Secondly, for the purchasing or owning player, they give bonuses in addition to their general effects now available to all. This includes access to better technologies, better units and city improvements. Thus the Ancient technology "Construction," which requires Iron Working and Mathematics to be in play before it can be purchased, enables players to upgrade their settlements from size one to size two (from villages to towns) and to purchase both the Aqueduct and Colosseum city improvements. The owning player gains a bonus in the form of a Wonder of the World -- in the case of Construction this is the Great Wall. In turn, this gives the owning player another bonus, which may be a happiness bonus, free units, a reduction in the cost of buying technologies, a trade or productivity bonus or some other miscellaneous effect. "The Great Wall" actually provides its owner a bonus to units in combat when they defend a civilization's cities. In a departure from the computer game, some technologies -- Alphabet/Writing, The Printing Press, Computers, and Steam Power -- are marked as Seminal and score more points at the end.

This Dark Conspiracy: The Tragedy of *Richard II*

*"For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings."
-- William Shakespeare, Richard II, III:ii:155-156*

Once more, we turn to the [occult dramaturgies](#) of William Shakespeare, as fuel for history and mystery alike. Tales of dramaturgies and curses and riot and rebellion await, behind the curtain of the suppressed theater. They say that when you shoot at a king, you must not miss. With *Richard II*, Shakespeare fires for effect.

*"I will not vex your souls --
Since presently your souls must part your bodies --
With too much urging your pernicious lives,
For 'twere no charity; yet, to wash your blood
From off my hands, here in the view of men
I will unfold some causes of your deaths.."
-- William Shakespeare, Richard II, III:i:4-9*

The play begins at the court of King Richard II, where he determines that two quarreling nobles, Henry of Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray, must settle their differences (over who killed Richard's uncle -- and rival -- Thomas of Woodstock, the Duke of Gloucester) at trial by combat. Just before the combat can begin, Richard arbitrarily cancels the trial, exiles both nobles, and heads off to make war in Ireland, leaving the old Duke of York as regent. On the way, he stops to insult the noble John of Gaunt (Bolingbroke's father) and, upon John's death, disinherits Bolingbroke and seizes John's lands for the crown. Bolingbroke, allied with powerful nobles like the Earl of Northumberland, thereupon rebels against Richard and returns to England; while Richard dithers in Ireland, Bolingbroke's troops smash Richard's supporters in Wales. Richard retreats to Flint Castle, where Bolingbroke besieges him and then humbly requests (or politely demands) the return of his lands, the end of his banishment, and a pardon. Richard grants Bolingbroke's requests, and becomes a shadow king in Bolingbroke's power.

Bolingbroke removes Richard to London and masterfully reworks the quarrel from the beginning of the play to implicate Richard for ordering Gloucester's death, Mowbray having conveniently died in Venice in the meanwhile. In a staged denunciation before Parliament, Bolingbroke deposes Richard; Richard consents to remove his crown and give it to Bolingbroke (who becomes Henry IV, and sets up two more plays thereby), but does not read out or consent to the charges against him, leaving Bolingbroke in a precarious position. Indeed, Aumerle, the son of the Duke of York, immediately plots (with the Abbot of Westminster and others) the murder of Bolingbroke and the restoration of Richard; York turns on his son and his former liege to reveal the plot. Aumerle's own confession, and the plea of the Duchess of York, save his life, but Bolingbroke executes the other plotters and must forestall further schemes. His agent, Sir Pierce of Exton, and two servants attack and kill Richard in prison; Bolingbroke repudiates Exton and the murder, but announces that he will go on Crusade "to wash this blood off from my guilty hand." On this unsettled note, the play ends.

*"In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire
With good old folks and let them tell thee tales
Of woeful ages long ago betid;
And ere thou bid good night, to quit their griefs,
Tell thou the lamentable tale of me
And send the hearers weeping to their beds:
For why, the senseless brands will sympathize
The heavy accent of thy moving tongue
And in compassion weep the fire out;
And some will mourn in ashes, some coal-black,
For the deposing of a rightful king."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, V:i:43-53

Whether the historical Bolingbroke ever made this pledge is doubtful; not only was his reign marked by continuous rebellion (as thrice prophesied in the play -- by the Duke of York, the Earl of Carlisle, and Richard himself) but he was destined (or so claimed the rumor) to die "in Jerusalem." As it happened, Henry died in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey -- a fitting revenge for having ordered the death of the Abbot of Westminster thirteen years ago. Shakespeare read about the death-by-prophecy, and the other details of his story, in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* of 1587, from which he took most of the events of *Richard II*. He also may have consulted early volumes of Samuel Daniel's *The Civile Warres*, Froissart's *Chronicles*, and other texts. He also borrowed some incidents from an anonymous play, *Thomas of Woodstock*, and the thematic structure from Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* about another weak but attractive king deposed by usurpers. The unusual (for Shakespeare) fidelity to historical events (barring adding a decade to the prepubescent Queen Isabella's age, and subtracting one from Northumberland's son Henry) probably sprang from that touchy subject matter -- the Virgin Queen Elizabeth would not look kindly on a play about overthrowing a monarch who had no clear heir.

*"Thou fond mad woman,
Wilt thou conceal this dark conspiracy?
A dozen of them here have ta'en the sacrament,
And interchangeably set down their hands,
To kill the king at Oxford."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, V:ii:107-111

Shakespeare's research didn't save his poetry; the first three quartos in which he published his play omitted 150 lines in Act IV, Scene i, the deposition of Richard by Bolingbroke -- the heart of the drama, but the touchiest part of the text. Although unprinted, the scene was likely performed, if only in private homes such as that of Sir Edward Hoby. Hoby, as it happened, hosted a private performance on the night ("as late as you wish to come") of December 7, 1595, for Sir Robert Cecil, one of the Queen's chief advisers (and very possibly the man who ordered the [death of Marlowe](#)). Hoby lived near Henry Percy, the "Wizard Earl" of Northumberland, patron of the [School of Night](#). Was he a stalking-horse for Percy's attempt to draw Cecil into a conspiracy against the Queen? Such speculations are more than our usual fancies, because it's a matter of historical fact that genuine conspirators against Queen Elizabeth, including Northumberland's brother Sir Charles Percy, used *Richard II* in just that fashion.

Sir Charles, along with Shakespeare's old patron the Earl of Southampton, masterminded an attempt to break the Earl of Essex out of house arrest, storm the city of London, and raise the populace against the Queen. To raise the populace, the plotters sought propaganda -- Shakespeare's censored, provocative play (which also, not coincidentally, foregrounded a conspirator Earl of Northumberland). According to the testimony of Augustine Phillips, one of Shakespeare's players, "Sir Charles Percy, Sir Jocelyne Percy, and the Lord Montague with some three more spake to some of the players . . . to have the play of the deposing and killing of King Richard the Second to be played the Saturday next promising to get them forty shillings more then their ordinary to play it." Thirty pieces of silver, the proper price for treason, concealed with a ten-shilling tip? We notice another parallel in this story, as the unnamed "three more" echo not only the three murderers sent against Richard in the play, and the three murderers in [Macbeth](#), but our traditional troublemaking [trio of ultraterrestrials](#). True to their hire, Shakespeare's company performed *Richard II* at the Globe on February 7, 1601 -- but the rebellion faltered thanks to Essex' Ricardian dithering. Essex was beheaded on Ash Wednesday -- the day after Shakespeare's company again performed "a play" for Queen Elizabeth at Whitehall.

*"I have worn so many winters out,
And know not now what name to call myself.
O! that I were a mockery king of snow,
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
To melt myself away in water-drops."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, IV:i:266-270

In short, even without the occult insights afforded by the Rosicrucian and alchemist Sir William Vaughan (who shared

a printer with Shakespeare, and was tied to Essex' household by marriage), the dramaturgical dynamite in Shakespeare's *Richard II* was obvious. Queen Elizabeth herself remarked on it, when she chewed out the historian of the Tower, William Lambarde, saying "I am Richard II, know ye not that?" and noting meaningfully that "this tragedie was played forty times in open streets and houses." Richard II is the classic sacred king, the "Lord's anointed," from whom "Not all the water in the rough rude sea/Can wash the balm" and who calls upon the spiders, snakes, and toads of his land to poison his enemies. But, significantly, he is a Winter King -- his tears "shall lodge the summer corn, and make a dearth," he links himself with a "king of snow" and with the sun "in the antipodes," which is to say, in winter. And like Queen Elizabeth (and Marlowe's Edward II) he is sterile, without an heir, and the land suffers (drought had, in fact, begun to ravage England by the time of Essex' rebellion). Bolingbroke, "the sun" rides into London on Richard's horse, receiving the people's plaudits as they cast dirt on Richard -- a classical "scapegoat" transplanting of the land's woes onto the [scarecrow](#), the "mockery king." Richard is then sent to Pomfret in Yorkshire, "where shivering cold and sickness pines the clime" and killed with an axe in proper sacred-sacrifice fashion. By explicitly setting out the True King as Winter King, Shakespeare points the path by which the Lord's anointed can be deposed.

*"And if you crown him, let me prophesy,
The blood of English shall manure the ground
And future ages groan for this foul act;*

*. . .
Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny
Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd
The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.."
-- William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, IV:i:141-149*

But Shakespeare's play was hardly a precision instrument. Essex somehow wound up magically identified with Richard rather than Bolingbroke -- the poet returned from Ireland in disgrace, mocked by the populace of London, and unable to rally his energies. Shakespeare built some of these tripwires into the play itself -- magical safeties on a doomsday weapon against the Crown. Richard undoes his own magical kingship when he aborts the ritual combat between Bolingbroke and Mowbray; he breaks the ritual circle with dire consequences. As the play says, "within the hollow crown that rounds the mortal temples of a king, keeps Death his court." Richard has unspilled Death, first by taking royal blood without warrant (when he had Gloucester, his uncle, murdered), then by breaking the ritual circle, then by turning over his crown. He seems to realize this; he says "Now mark me how I will undo myself" and then not only abdicates but attempts to wash away not just the balm but [his entire reign](#). His blood sacrifice doesn't renew the land, but poison it with civil war and lead to the death of future ages. Although Elizabeth deflected Essex' dramaturgy, her own successors also reaped civil war in the future.

But six years after Essex, perhaps some conspiracy, some circle, attempted to divert this bane onto other shores. On September 30, 1607, 208 years to the day after Richard II's deposition, the ship's company of the East India Company ship *Red Dragon* performed *Richard II* while anchored off the coast of Sierra Leone in Africa. 208 years after that, in 1815, the play reopened at Drury Lane in March -- just in time for Napoleon Bonaparte to return from Elba. Did the Rosicrucian heirs of Vaughn and Percy try to break the ritual circle, with the alchemically-named *Red Dragon* as the fulcrum on "all the water in the rough rude sea," reach their "arm of length" across the sea to France -- just as Richard II did, in having Gloucester murdered in Calais? Was Napoleon, the usurper of Isabella's heirs, made to pay for Elizabeth's sterility and Essex' arrogance as well? Has all the blood washed off their guilty hands, or are there still more stories to tell of the death of kings?

Oh, Well; Maybe Next Year We'll Meet The Great Pumpkin

As I write this, I'm at five days 'til Christmas. My goal for the past month has been to get my ducks in a row enough so that I can go home for the holiday . . . the first time I'd be able to do so for the first time in a decade or so.

And at this time, not only are my ducks not in a row, they are in an oddly shaped ellipse, slowly rotating in formation as they taunt me in Duck. My Day Job has been challenging during the season, my car broke down last week, I've been sick for about three weeks with the proverbial Nagging Congestion that has infected everyone else at my Day Job Office, and I've had some kind of furred canine gnawing on my left arm for several days. (I believe it to be a wolverine, but the Florida State University biology department seems torn, with half theorizing it to be a Tasmanian wolf and the other half suspecting it is actually former F.B.I. director J. Edgar Hoover. Despite the pain, however, I *can* type about 10 words a minute faster with it attached thanks to the two dangly-but-accurate feet on the end, so I'm torn as to whether or not I should keep it.) Which, in a nutshell, means that it's still up in the air as to whether or not I'll make it home. Now, if I don't, it won't be the end of the world; as I stated previously, I haven't done so in my post-adult life, so one more year won't make a big difference. On the other hand, it *would* be nice. So I'm still trying to make it happen.

So, in an effort to tie it into gaming, I'll note that my quest to get home is an unusual sort of goal. First, it's neither long-term or short-term. It's not "long-term" in the sense that it will cause the campaign to end or radically change should it be completed ("Overthrow the Evil Empire," "Expose the conspiracy," "Stop the fading of the stars"), nor is it a short-term goal the likes of which most adventures revolve around ("defeat the Lizard King", "recover the Hamster of Thor"). Instead, it's in the middle; it's one of those that would be nice if it were resolved, and it will take a while to resolve . . . either because it's complicated or because it's of limited opportunity. Really, these "mid-term goals" are some of the most common kinds of goals in the real world, but they're surprisingly underrepresented in many media forms; some novel series (or longer novels) will have these kind of goals, as will some serial forms of television (most notably shows like *The Sopranos* and *Babylon 5*) and comic books.

The reason behind this is obvious; most movies don't have the scope necessary to support these kind of stories -- either needing to zoom the story in to short-term goals or out to epic long-term tales -- while most television shows probably believe the audience can only focus on immediate episode-long goals or else those overarching series-focused goals ("He's going from town to town, looking for the two-armed man who killed that waitress."¹).

But, actually, these kind of goals are very well-suited for roleplaying games. After all, the "audience" of most RPGs doesn't need to be reminded as much of the dangling plot threads; they tend to make their *own* notes as to what to follow up! And these mid-term goals can serve as satisfying buffers between the day-to-day plots and the overarching story of the campaign.

Now, we've talked previously about [setting and resolving goals](#), so I won't duplicate that effort much. Instead, let's look at some fiddly bits that are more prevalent in these mid-term goals.

Both the GM and the player(s) should have similar ideas as to how long the plot will take to resolve. These don't need to be exact, but they should be of a similar order of magnitude. So let's say a player creates a storyline where his character needs to track down the person who killed his parents. If the GM decides this plot is going to unfold over the first year or so of the campaign, while the player is hoping to finish it in the first three adventures or so, there are going to be problems. ("I'm following every lead, every thread, and every witness until they roll over and *tell me what I want to know!!!*") Of course, similar problems will arise if the player is hoping the plot will *never* be resolved. ("It turns out the Pirate Overlord was behind their deaths. You stab him; he dies." "Dangit! Now where am I gonna get my angst?!?") As ever, communication will do wonders to keep this from being an issue.

Coming up with a satisfying reason as to *why* this goal will take a while to resolve will do wonders for making it work.

An obvious reason is a plethora of [complications](#) . . . other obligations, broken vehicles, illnesses, and arm-gnawing mammals all make for fine reasons why an otherwise straightforward plot cannot be solved more immediately. Another very logical complication is seasonal; perhaps a character has a dream of winning the Indianapolis 500, or wants to complete a ritual to resurrect his brother that can only be completed on the Winter Solstice. Well, those are set timetables; if something happens to thwart that schedule, then the mid-term plot will be put on hold until the next opportunity. ("Save the world?!? But . . . but the Indianapolis 500 is today!")

In a world with magic or soft science, it's possible to construct interesting mid-term goals revolving around fabricated (but logical) situations. For example, the heroes may discover a portal to an alternate dimension with a village trapped therein; this portal only remains open for an hour on each full moon, and at the end of that time, those not a part of the other-realm get shunted back out into reality. The party has an hour each month to try and free them (or explore this other area); this kind of restriction can feel more organic than more heavy-handed options. ("You are about to unmask the man who killed your parents, but the lights go out and he gets away . . .") Such periods of opportunity are also useful for showing how a character has changed and grown in the interim. ("Wow! Last time I entered the Indianapolis 500, I didn't have these neat cybernetic eyes!")

Beware of pulling the rug too often. It's possible for such a plot to go on *too* long, or for its complications to become too obnoxious . . . especially if the base scenario doesn't allow for much variety or difference. (This is called the "Thank You, But Our Princess Is In Another Castle" Syndrome.) If this looks like it may be the case, consider resolving the old one, then possibly starting up a new one; it's always better to have two enjoyable mid-term goals in a year than one frustrating mid-term goal.

Done right, those goals that take a while to see to fruition -- seeming to be tantalizingly out of grasp while still being solvable - can be greatly satisfying.

And speaking of satisfying, hopefully in a few days (to quote that old chestnut) I'll be home for Christmas.

But if not, maybe next year.

--*Steven Marsh*

¹ Extra Bonus No-Prize to anyone who can cite the early Nick-at-Nite reference this is drawn from.

* * *

Last week's answer: In Nomine Game Master Pack, p. 18.

(Three stars)

2) *Fetchez la vache!* Moo. Lose a page.

3) On the wrong end of a nasty taunting. Lose a persona.

Immaculata Colony

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Cartography by Kory M. Kaese, [Mystic Station Designs, LLC](#)

Genre: Fantasy

Style: Pioneering

Fidelity: Low

Themes: Exploration, Colonization, and Weird Magic

Campaign Setting and Background Information

Once, the island kingdom of Grimfalk ruled much of Homeworld: Their navy held sway over the seas, their armies conquered all opposition, and their Sigilmasters called on mighty magics to cow their enemies. But, as with all things, this age of victory passed. Over time, their ships foundered, their knights faltered, and their magic withered away. Left in the dust raised by the march of history, Grimfalk stagnated into a backwater, only fit to produce marriageable princes and princesses of royal blood for the rising thrones of other, younger lands.

Grimfalk turned inward, collapsing in upon itself, comforting itself in memories of its glorious past. Grimfalklanders clung to their increasingly outmoded traditions like drowning men. They misremembered, embroidered, and claimed precedence for the new thoughts and ways of other lands, in a mad scramble to retain prestige. Grimfalk culture grew more twisted, insular, traditional, and baselessly arrogant. And seeing all this for what it was, the world laughed at them.

Then, bowed in humiliation, something happened: A scholar of Sigil-lore performed an experiment, using the old, powerless Sigils on a mysterious stone. A magical Gate bloomed, like a flower in the desert, leading to a pristine world on the other side of the Sun. Unknown to the other nations of Homeworld (and even most of the populace of Grimfalk), Immaculata Colony is full of new plants, new animals, new gods, and new magics to be discovered and exploited by Grimfalk, and Grimfalk alone.

What Everybody Knows

Homeworld Politics: Frankly, Grimfalk has had its day. It lacks resources: little gold and iron, and no surplus crops or animal products. All its mainland colonies were lost decades ago; its military forces stripped away; its magics rendered impotent. It's too far away -- and too poor -- to be worth conquering by any of the younger nations.

The only export it has that other nations want are individuals of royal blood. Mainland dynastic marriages and associated politics have become increasingly tangled. Grimfalklander royals are "safe": while they bring no land-wealth with them (actually, the dowries for aristocrats of either sex are fairly steep, and these monies support the faltering Grimfalklander throne), they also do not complicate issues of succession and inheritance. While this custom has tied the royal line of Grimfalk to all the thrones of Homeworld in theory, in practice, they are treated much like idiot children or senile grandparents: a public show of regard with private dismissal or neglect.

King Maximillian Cavendish -- who in an earlier age would have set the world ablaze given his talents and skills -- is understandably enraged by this marginalization. But what can he do?

Sigils & Sigilmasters: In the past, the alphabet of Sigils contained power: power to make bronze into iron's equal, power to let wood resist fire, power to cultivate crops on barren rock. Some even say that in the far past, the right Sigil scribed on a corpse's forehead could restore life. Today, these assertions are treated as mere legends. Some

superstitious people -- generally uneducated peasants or simple-minded Grimfalklanders -- still scribe them to attract good luck or repel bad luck; but no objective evidence exists that such squiggles have any effect.

On the other hand, the art of Salutory Symbology is a recognized and replicable -- if still dangerous and mysterious -- science, accepted by all erudite folk. The proper dermal stimulation of the body's energy fields through use of specialized pictograms can stop bleeding, increase the healing rate of tissue and bone, and act as a prophylactic against disease. True, there is a risk of malignancy if the Symbology is flawed or unbalanced (what the rustics quaintly dub "trollification"), but there's nothing mystical about that -- just misapplied science. Thus, "Hedge Sigilry," or the use of Salutory Symbology by unlicensed practitioners, is considered a serious crime. "Sigilmaster," by the way, is a much-diluted and empty title nowadays; the title for a specialist in Salutory Symbology is "Symbologist." While some of the best medical Symbologists come from Grimfalk's Sigiligarian College, they are often ignored and treated as *déclassé*.

Iron, Steel, & Gunpowder: Lack of iron and gunpowder were two of the nails in Grimfalk's coffin. While their Sigils held power, Grimfalklander knights could stand against iron (later, steel) and musket and prevail. Now, Grimfalk's warriors are as powerless as their Sigils when facing the modern technology of war.

Religion: The earliest religions were the veneration of clan totems and nature spirits. This evolved into more anthropomorphic pantheons of gods, usually including the Sky Father, the Earth Mother, the Wind Twins, the Sun Dog, the Moon Cat, the Vegetable Virgin, the Beast Lord, the Sigil Maker, and assorted appropriate culture heroes. While magic ran strong, so did all the temples; now that magic is in decline, the variety in religion is contracting as well. Most pantheons have dwindled into monotheistic cults, and spiritualism and secularism are taking up the slack. Priests and priestesses still hold a traditional and social role, but their direct power has weakened. Still, people still have ecstatic visions and hear the call of the divine, all of which reinforce the theme of humanity being the favored child of the universe.

What Those-In-The-Know Know

Sigils & "Salutory Symbology": They're the same thing. Grimfalklander scholars know this, but every attempt to point this out to their learned colleagues on the mainland leads to laughed rebukes. The Sigils for human healing are the same in the best medical hospitals as they were in warchief's fortresses ten centuries ago. Unfortunately, these scholars cannot explain why Salutory Symbology retains magical power when all other Sigils have become useless. Some radical and overly-exuberant students of the Sigiligarian College claim to have found signs that seemingly affect ghosts, psychic powers, and other fringe phenomena, but as the evidence of existence for those things is exceptionally tentative (and that's being kind), the Sigilmasters tell them to keep quiet, so as not to make the situation even worse.

Some further detail about "trollification" or "Malignant Symbolic Effects": If an unbalanced or malformed pictogram is applied to a patient, several undesired alterations can occur during the healing process. Orifices can seal shut, rapid bone growth in other parts of the skeleton can happen, skin will discolor, muscle tissue will quickly increase, impairment of perception (especially visual and tactile), reduction of intellect, or some combination of these elements.

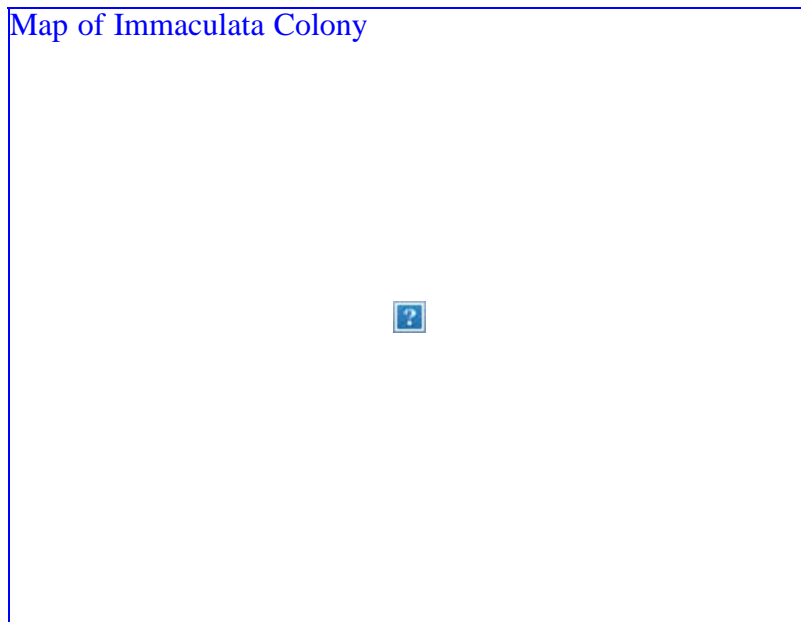
The Mystery Stone: Said to have fallen from the heavens, this smooth, ovoid rock (about the size of a large dog) held a place of honor in the Trophy Hall of the Dukes of Hargrave for three and a quarter centuries. All sorts of strange events (visions, miracles, sensations) are rumored to happen in its presence. When the twentieth Duke passed on 16 years ago, he willed the Mystery Stone to the Sigiligarian College (his old alma mater) for undisclosed reasons. It sat on the Quad -- near the Bell Tower, bearing a commemorative plaque -- and served many a student, instructor, or Sigilmaster as a thought-provoking perch.

One such student -- later professor, and still later Sigilmaster -- partial to such roosting was David Makkle. While seated upon the Mystery Stone a sunny winter afternoon two years ago, attempting to reconcile an abstruse mismatch between a "dead" Sigil and a "live" Salutory Symbol, Makkle became distracted by the nature of the Mystery Stone itself. What was it made of, and where did it really come from? He scraped a sample and took it to a colleague's alchemical lab for analysis, expecting it to be a lump of nickel ore from the northern mountains. It wasn't.

In fact, Makkle's alchemist friend could not explain the provenance of the Mystery Rock at all. "Perhaps it did fall

from the sky," he joked. Makkle didn't laugh. Instead, he began researching. Armed with codices of mineralogical Sigils, engraver's tools, and the permission of the College's Master, Makkle erected a pavilion around the Mystery Rock and began studying Sigil effects upon it. Two years later, his experiments bore unexpected fruits: intriguing new theories about Sigils, and the Gate.

The Gate: Nearly every month, on the day of the full moon, about seven paces from the center of the Mystery Rock, a 20-foot diameter "doorway" opens to another world. As the year progresses, the Gate circles it, starting at 12 o'clock (which is North) in June and moving clockwise. This doorway remains open for one hour, and objects and beings can pass through this doorway in either direction during that span without any visible harm. However, on the equinoxes (September, or 3 o'clock; and March, or 9 o'clock), no Gate appears; this mysterious skipping will eventually be called "Hiatus." Makkle has named the new world "Immaculata," as it seems untouched by humanity (see *OPTION: Immaculatan Natives?*). (For simplicity's sake, full moons happen on the 15 of the month, the winter solstice is December 15, the vernal equinox is March 15, the summer solstice is June 15, and the autumnal equinox is September 15.)



Immaculata Colony (What's Known at Different Phases)

The exploration of Immaculata (and the Immaculata Colony CiaB) takes place in several Phases. During each Phase, more information about the new world of Immaculata becomes available.

Phase Zero: David Makkle's researches begin on the Mystery Rock in the third year of the Reign of King Maximillian (RKM), and eventually culminate in the opening of the Gate on midnight of June 15, 5 RKM. Seasons and daylight on Immaculata are reversed from Homeworld: a summer midnight becomes a winter noon. Observed plants appear to be variants of Homeworld species, with slight changes in coloration and structure. Some large moths observed (see also *OPTION: Immaculatan Flora & Fauna*). Only the immediate area of the Gate icon on the Map has been explored. Phase Zero lasts until August 1, 5 RKM, when news of the Gate is finally transmitted to the King.

Phase 1: Begins on August 1, 5 RKM, as King Maximillian is made aware of the existence of Immaculata. He selects a small exploratory group of 50 men

OPTION: Immaculatan Flora & Fauna

As written, the plants and animals of Immaculata are simply different, but related, breeds to those of Homeworld. One justification could be that the universal spirits (see below, *Kubu*) act as archetypes, causing lock-step development

(aristocrats, soldiers, scouts, scholars, traders, and freemen) suitably provisioned and under the command of Captain Grigolas Quapp, to pass through the Gate for a month's sojourn in the new world. Unfortunately, the first Hiatus occurs (see above).

Homeworld's full moon corresponds to Immaculata's new moon; the Immaculatan moon is smaller and redder than that of Homeworld. The latitude of the Gate site on both worlds seems to be the same. Constellations in the night skies are the same as on Homeworld, only differing as would be expected by a seasonal shift; thus, Immaculata is in the same Solar System as Homeworld. Immaculatan plants and animals are nourishing to Homeworld animals and humans; Homeworld plants and animals are nourishing to Immaculatan animals. However, transplanted Immaculatan living things *weaken* on Homeworld, while Homeworld species *thrive* on Immaculata. Humans in Immaculata have mixed feelings -- they are simultaneously full of energy, yet feel stifled (see *EXPLANATION: Kubu vs. Kavi*). Founding of Roxo Settlement on August 10, approximately three miles from the Gate site, where guards are left on watch at all times. Discovery of green rabbits, golden wolves, and blue deer; all unafraid of man and quite dangerous. Bog iron discovered in peat cuttings. Salutary Symbology very weak. Late in September, Roxo is struck by the Bloodsweats. Explored range is Circle A on the Map. Phase 1 ends on October 15, when the Gate reopens; by that time sixteen men of the group are dead from misadventure or disease. Captain Quapp and Count Nedecker find themselves at odds over administration of the group.

of life across the cosmos. To make Immaculata even odder, however, it's an easy task to replace these more familiar denizens with wilder options: dinosaurs or other saurians, prehistoric mammals (a la Julian May's *Saga of Pliocene Exile*), insectoids and other invertebrates, or even blurring the boundaries between plant and animal.

Phase 2: Begins on October 15, 5 RKM, and continues through May 15, 6 RKM. Phase 2 involves further investigation of Immaculata, and building infrastructure for the Colony. Scouting parties sent on thorough mapping expeditions; Watzi Ruins sighted and scouted. Numerous settlers experience visions, strange apparitions, or visits from "demon things" (speaking animals, minerals, vegetables, or meteorological events). During this phase, the wakeapple tree, seams of coal, and gold-bearing streams are discovered. Iron foundry established to process bog iron; first watermill constructed. Harvest time brings smaller yields than expected, as the Homeworld seeds planted by the colonists suffer heavy predation by Immaculatan vermin and weeds; however, the surviving produce is of surpassing quality. The colonists survive a lean winter on a combination of this harvest, native forage and hunting, and supplies through the Gate. On December 16, the Captain and the Count almost come to blows in the heat of Immaculatan summer. The power of Salutary Symbology is still less than on Homeworld, but has begun to work on minor health problems. Fewer outbreaks of the Bloodsweats, but the afflicted still die more often than not. Explored range is Circle B. By the end of Phase 2, 500 men or more (and tons of material) have been sent through the Gate, and the first loads of Immaculatan furs, ores, plants, and spices come to Homeworld.

Phase 3: Begins on May 15, 6 RKM, when Sigilmaster David Makkle passes through the Gate (for the first time since Phase Zero) to take up residence in Roxo, and continues indefinitely. Maintenance of the Colony, further exploration and exploitation of Immaculata, which boasts 1,000 colonists by end of 7 RKM. Mining, metalworking, and other industries running strong; second-year crop yields are trebled. Working from reports of the settlers and personal experience, Makkle ascertains the nature of the Kubu and how they relate to Sigilry, and attempts to develop an Immaculatan Sigil language based on pacts with native Kavi. Power level of Salutary Symbology now equivalent to that of Homeworld. Political issues arise in the Colony over governance, and Count Varig Nedecker at last seizes power from Captain Quapp. The first human child is born on Immaculata on February 2, 8 RKM (this also brings a Human Kavi into being -- see below). Search for a second settlement site begins. The Watzi return to their ruins and begin moving towards Roxo on March 1, 8 RKM. Explored range is Circle C on the Map.

Effects on Homeworld (At Different Phases)

Phase Zero: No effect.

Phase 1: Sharp Grimfalklanders (or exceptionally astute foreign Homeworlders) might notice an increase in secretive goings on at the royal court of Grimfalk.

Phase 2: Grimfalk reduces the amount of iron it imports from other Homeworld countries. When previously ransom of prisoners was an option, foreign spies are now executed in Grimfalk.

Phase 3: Grimfalk no longer imports iron, coal, or steel from its neighbors. Late in this phase, Grimfalk traders begin trading Immaculatan goods (fruits, spices, and whackjack, especially). King Maximillian creates an international furor when he refuses to give his daughter Aliza to a neighboring sovereign in marriage.

King Maximillian's Plans For Immaculata Colony: Maximillian believes that Immaculata can provide the raw materials necessary for the arts of war, like timber, hemp, flax, tar, iron, coal, gold . . . maybe even magic. He sees the Gate as a gift from the gods: a vast storehouse of resources to be used for Grimfalk's resumption of world dominance, and as such, knowledge of the existence of the Gate and Immaculata is to be kept secret, by any means necessary. An efficient way to keep the Colony secret and continue to construct it, is to use prisoners, the younger sons of nobles, and other "undesirables" as labor, and disallowing return through the Gate save for those he personally finds trustworthy.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

Sigils & Magic: Sigils have no intrinsic power, despite what all Sigilmasters and Symbolists think. The reason they were (or are, in the case of Salutary Symbology) effective is that they detail agreements or contracts with spiritual powers named Kubu (see below). Each sub-rune in a Sigil represents a clause of the contract -- a service asked for, or a consideration tendered. For example, a typical weapon enchantment's Sigil contains sub-runes that could be translated to yield the following agreement (brackets indicate individual sub-rune elements):

[Kubu of steel] [in return for] [your strength] [I] [agree to] [polish] [your child] [once] [a day] [and] [dance (also can be read as "combat")] [with] [your child] [once] [a month] [and] [discard] [any of] [your children] [into] [water] [when] [they have broken]

Unfortunately, the knowledge of what each sub-rune corresponds to (the "contract language") has been lost. In essence, effective Sigils are "boilerplate agreements." Malformation of a sub-rune changes the terms of the pact, which may lead to unexpected effects (like trollification) or total voiding of the contract (through conflicting clauses). Also, if one does not provide the appropriate considerations for services rendered, either the Sigil becomes ineffective or bad things happen. This ignorance of the basis of Sigils, combined with the dwindling of all Kubu -- other than those of humanity -- has led to the erosion of Sigil-power. Note also that Immaculatan Kubu (also known as a Kavi) will not recognize the contracts struck with Homeworld Sigils: an entirely new Sigil-language will need to be developed. Sigilmaster David Makkle is the closest person on Homeworld to understanding the nature of Sigils, due to his long study of the Mystery Stone . . . which contains and channels a Kavi.

Kubu: Kubu are the self-aware essence of objects, actions, or events; the sum total of the "life-force" or "spiritual reality" of a class of things. There are Kubu of rocks, trees, animals, storms, water, oceans, wind, sunlight, people, etc. Kubu exist to support, protect, guide, and celebrate their particular phenomenon: the more of that phenomenon exists, the stronger they get. Kubu

OPTION: Immaculatan Natives?

This CiaB is written such that there are no native sentient physical life-forms (i.e., humans or humanoids) on Immaculata (well, there are the *Kavi*, but they're essentially non-physical -- see below). However, there's nothing that says that a civilization of goblins, or saurians, or blue humans, or whatever can't be living somewhere just off the map. Maybe the Watzi (see below) really *are* intelligent -- just really strange. Feel free to plug in some natives if you choose.

The King's Commands to Scouts and Settlers of Immaculata:

- A. You shall do your best to find the strongest, healthiest, and most fertile place near a navigable river, choosing one that runs farthest into the land. Choose a site to better receive the trade of all future settlements about you in the land.
- B. You will always maintain a Watch, so that when any enemy is in sight, the Watch may give you speedy warning.
- C. Divide your people into four parts: 1) one party to

exist both within and without; each individual contributes to the Kubu overmind. All Kubu are connected to one another in a branching tree-like way: The Kubu of Housecats and the Kubu of Tigers are both aspects of the Kubu of Felines, which is part of the Kubu of Animals, which in turn is but a facet of the Kubu of Living Things that is but a subset of the Kubu of Homeworld (on up the chain until one reaches the Universal Kubu). Kubu can see and be seen (and communicate with) by those in the proper mental state; they manifest in visions, wearing a multitude of forms: the Wolf Kubu could be a talking lupine, the Gold Kubu may appear as a metal-scaled snake, the Oak Kubu as a tall, green-haired man. Early shaman developed the barter of services between human-kind and Kubu-kind on Homeworld. Sigils (see above) were a later development that allowed non-shaman to strike basic deals with the spirits. Immaculatan Kubu are called *Kavi*.

Shaman: The ability to recognize and communicate with Kubu has long been occulted on Homeworld due to the deterioration of all Kubu save Humanity's. While shamanic potential exists widely in the population, the strongest shamanic training per se is clustered in the temples -- those given to mystic visions of the gods often join the clergy. Or they start their own splinter religion, based on their revealed knowledge. Or they tend to speak to animals, plants, rocks, and storms, and are treated as lunatics. In any case, these clerics, mystics, and madmen may be invaluable to colonists' efforts to tame Immaculata.

Colonist Culture Under the Kavi: Frankly, the settlers of Immaculata will be changed from living in a Kavi-rich environment (not to mention isolated on a new world). They will grow less concerned with social niceties in the wake of relying on each other despite differences in social class (or starve, freeze, or other trials) and simultaneously more self-reliant as they find themselves meeting their challenges. They'll discover a love for the wide open spaces and the contemplation of innumerable possibilities. And they'll probably grow more superstitious, insular, and paranoid. The notions of freedom, community, equality, and self-determination are nascent, but germinating.

Why the Gate Works: In simple terms, Makkle struck a bargain with the homesick (and weakened) Kavi of the Mystery Stone. It connected with its brethren and parent Kavi (and perhaps struck an agreement will weakened Stone Kubu) in an unexpected way to open a Gate home. Of course, Makkle doesn't really know what he agreed to in return for this great boon. But as he becomes more and more aware of the true nature of Sigils, he has begun to have terrible nightmares . . .

NPC Backgrounds

King Maximillian Cavendish: The King cares more about his land than his honor, more about his people than his land, and more about his family than his people. A masterful administrator, he has skillfully managed the resources of his distressed country better than could be believed. Untried in war, he relies on diplomacy and espionage to protect Grimfalk on the international scene. From Maximillian's point of view, there are three main goals for the Immaculatan colonists:

1. Find precious or useful metals;

fortify and build, first a storehouse and structures of public and necessary use; 2) one party to prepare, sow, and tend to produce, both animal and vegetable; 3) one party as Watch, charged with protecting the Colony; and 4) one party to serve as Scouts, charged with learning, evaluating, and mapping the wilderness.

- D. To avoid famine, try to live off the plants and beasts of Immaculata, in case your own crops fail.
- E. And howsoever weary your people are, they must never lay aside their weapons.
- F. If natives exist, do not offend them, if at all possible. Employ some of your company to trade with them for food and all other resources. Learn their language and ways, in order to best accomplish this.

EXPLANATION: Kubu vs. Kavi

The Kubu of Humanity (and related sub-Kubu -- Smiths, Farmers, Grimfalklanders, etc.) has beaten down, co-opted, consumed, or destroyed nearly all other Kubu on Homeworld -- this is why Sigils affecting iron, earth, fire, animals, etc., no longer work. (There may be some isolated patches of sleeping Kubu in some wilderness areas; see also *OPTION: An Immaculatan Gate.*)

2. Find other resources to support and strengthen Grimfalk; and
3. Create a stronghold for Grimfalk, in case We need to flee Homeworld.

Baron David Makkle, Sigilmaster: Brilliant scholar and mystic, Makkle lives to learn. Unmatched in his understanding of Sigilry, he's discovered a whole new world, and patriotically offered it to his liege. What Makkle lacks in social suavity, he makes up for with loyalty and honesty; for those two qualities, the King values him. He wishes to restore the powers of Sigils to what they were in the olden days . . . not for conquest, but for research.

Count Varig Nedecker: Master fencer, expert outdoorsman, lord of the hunt, and cousin to the King, Count Nedecker is an arrogant, ruthless bastard. What makes it worse is that in an emergency, he generally knows the right thing to do, and always has the interests of his peers (the aristocracy) in mind. He came to Immaculata for the sport of it, and stayed because the chance to build something new, of his own efforts, spoke strongly to him. He doesn't get along with Captain Quapp at all, seeing the soldier as little more than a muscle-bound peasant . . . and a freakish one at that.

Captain Grigolas Quapp aka Trollarm: Grigolas Quapp served as a forester for a minor baron during his youth, where he learned woodlore and beastlore, and became adept at tracking, trapping, and hunting. During this period is when he suffered a terrible wound to his right arm; a botched Salutary Symbol later, it grew warty, purplish, and five times as strong. Peerless with the bow, after winning an archery contest at the duchy fair, he came to the attention of the King's spymaster. After a brief "hunting trip" into foreign parts (which resulted in an untraceable assassination), Quapp became a valuable Crown tool. Resourceful and steadfast, he nevertheless tired of killing for political gain, and jumped at the chance to lead the exploratory group to Immaculata. He wishes only to settle down on a little horse farm, once the Colony is safe. He despises Count Nedecker as a hunter, and finds him too self-interested (or class-interested) to serve as a proper leader of men.

Items & Locations

Bloodsweats: A deadly illness characterized by fever, burst capillaries on the face, and crimson tint to the victim's sweat. Suspected to be contracted by eating undercooked flesh of blue deer; unfortunately, the virus is also communicable if the "bloodsweat" touches exposed skin. (In reality, it's the lack of support from Human Kubu and low-grade mystical assault by Immaculatan Kavi.)

Roxo Settlement: About four miles from the Gate, Roxo grows rapidly through each phase, going from a collection of tents in a palisade to a dozen longhouses around a fieldstone storehouse to a walled village boasting mills, smithies, and family homes, all surrounded by small farms.

Wakeapple: An extremely sour but edible crimson-purple apple. Its juice is naturally a mild astringent. Interestingly, when fermented, the cider acts as a stimulant (and the effect is greater when the cider is distilled), and has been dubbed "whackjack." Wakeapple -- in both fruit and beverage form -- becomes a valuable trade good on Homeworld.

Watzi Ruins: From a distance, this large brick-red mound looks like a shattered

Immaculatan Kavi rule their globe, and represent all its aspects, animal, vegetable, mineral, and meteorological. The only Kavi missing from this new world is that of Humanity. Immaculatan things are *more potent* -- animals are fiercer, stronger, and bigger; plants hardier, more luxuriant, and more nourishing; storms are greater, longer, more damaging, etc. -- because of the patronage of their Kavi. But this only really holds true *on* Immaculata.

For example, transplant an Immaculatan pig to Homeworld. Compared to a Homeworld pig, the Immaculatan is bigger and stronger, but will soon weaken due to the lack of Pig Kavi (or Kubu) to draw strength from. Homeworld life does not *require* the presence of Kubu to thrive, but can benefit from its presence. Move the Homeworld pig to Immaculata, and it will slowly grow stronger as it adapts to Pig Kavi, but will probably never reach native-born Immaculatan stature (its children might, if born on the new world). However, since all things carry a fraction of their Kubu/Kavi within them, to maintain a transplanted Immaculatan pig's strength and size longer, it would be best to bring an entire herd over.

Humans are an interesting case -- since initially there is no Human Kavi, they weaken (thus, the Bloodsweats). However, as more and more of them pour into the Colony, their Kubu multiplies and grows stronger, and deleterious effects reduce. They are also simultaneously energized and overwhelmed by the palpable presence of spiritual forces moving around them. After

castle . . . thus its name. When one approaches closer, it appears to be a tremendous number of spheres, stacked and cemented into place. The spheres are composed of clay, some sort of dung, nearly fossilized animal and vegetable offal, and an unknown binder. Composed of many chambers of varying size, the Ruins reach up 15 feet (split into three 5' tall stories), and burrows into the earth an additional two stories. Who -- or what -- raised this structure, and why they abandoned it is a vexing mystery . . . at least until Phase 3. (GM's option on what the Watzi are . . . ideas that might fit well include giant insects, omnivorous avians, pre-sentient macro-amoeboids, or even the post-sentient degenerate beings left after the Kavi destroyed one of their own: the Kavi of Primates.)

Possible PC Backgrounds

1. Scouts, hunters, or prospectors to explore Immaculata.
2. Soldiers (and priests, and Sigilmaster/Symbologists) to strengthen settlements.
3. Farmers and settlers to tame the land.
4. Merchants, craftsmen, and tradesmen to exploit Immaculata's resources.
5. Scholars to study the new world.
6. Prisoners (possibly offered freedom and land after their term is served), lunatics, younger (non-inheriting) aristocrats, and other undesirables, to use as labor and/or administration (and keep them out of the way).

Events & Possible Story Arcs

Phase-Specific Ideas

Phase Zero: PCs are students or colleagues of Makkle, present with him at the discovery of the Gate.

Phase 1: PCs are asked to join the exploratory group of 50 by the King or his agents. Other events include the basic exploration of Immaculata; the discovery of bog iron, green rabbits, blue deer, golden wolves; initial construction of Roxo; falling ill with the Bloodsweats; and enduring the Hiatus.

Phase 2: PCs may experience a Kavi vision; be sent on a mapping expedition; build the foundry or mill; harvest crops; hunt and forage for food for the colony; discover the wakeapple tree, gold, coal; find and scout the Watzi Ruins; see (or precipitate) the Count and the Captain's argument; and explore the River.

Phase 3: PCs might stake their own claim or open their own business; work with Makkle on understanding the Kavi and developing new Sigils; get involved in colonial politics (colony governance, building local institutions, seek independence from Homeworld); be present at/help deliver/parent the first human child; search for a new settlement location; and see the Watzi on the move.

General Ideas

February 2, 8 RKM, as the first human child is born in the Colony, a Human Kavi coalesces, and the Bloodsweats virtually vanish overnight.

OPTIONS: Kubu Kickstart and Kounter-Kolonization

Perhaps the opening of the Gate allows the Kubu to reawaken, kickstarted by their Immaculatan siblings. This would result in Homeworld Sigil magic beginning to work again (provided the pacts are kept), which would put Grimfalk Sigilmasters back in a position of power.

Maybe comatose Kubu taken through the Gate will awaken and rebound, competing with Kavi on Immaculata. Perhaps the culling on Homeworld by the Human Kubu has made them more capable (or desperate), and freed of its dominance, will fight tooth and nail for power.

Another choice may be to allow Kavi to colonize those niches on Homeworld left empty by the death of Kubu. This leakage back would again lead to more "magic" appearing on Homeworld as the new Kavi take over management of their elements, but the old Sigils (as detailed above) would not work.

OPTION: An Immaculatan Gate

One way to set up a Gate on Immaculata that would connect to Homeworld would be to find a Homeworld boulder of similar mass with a still-active Kubu,

Finding, holding, losing, or recovering the basic necessities of food, water, shelter, and protection. (A great winter storm could knock down houses, which must be repaired before all die of exposure.)

- Mysterious disappearance of a colonist, animal, structure, or tool.
- Discovery of a new animal, plant, or mineral resource.
- Discovery of a new geographical or topological feature.
- Construction of a building or public necessity (community barn, storehouse/granary, fire station, kiln, printer's shop, tannery, etc.).
- Interact with the Kavi.
- Get lost in the wilderness.
- Get married and/or set up housekeeping of one's own property.

Special Subplots

- *You've Inherited, M'Lord!*: An aristocratic second son receives word that his elder brother has died; now he is the lord of the manor, and must return to Homeworld to take up the family estate . . . which is actually smaller and more destitute than his Immaculatan holdings, built by his own hands. What to do?
- *The Invisible Rebel/Liberator*: Someone is printing seditious broadsheets, calling for a rebellion against King Maximillian, closing the Gate, letting Homeworld go hand. He signs himself "The Invisible Rebel." Who could he be? Does he garner sympathy or antipathy amongst the colonists?
- *Spies Like Us*: Word from Homeworld is that one of the colonists is a spy for a foreign power. Knowledge of Immaculata must not pass back through the Gate. How to discover the hidden enemy, and what happens if that enemy is the one who shared his meager crust of bread with you during the hard winter?

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Pioneering: Pioneering games are about seeking out the resources, wealth, and vistas of new worlds; staking a claim and creating one's own holding; defending oneself and one's fellows from rampaging beasts, tempestuous storms, the isolation of the frontier, and other ordeals; and taming the wild, within and without. This sort of campaign can be a refreshing change from tomb raiding and military sorties, but some players may find "create civilization" a vague goal to strive for. In that case, a GM should focus on the most basic goal of all life: "survive." Many of the inhabitants of Homeworld are ill-suited for pioneering (foppish nobles, political prisoners, crusading priests); this is a great opportunity for players to learn along with their characters.

take it through the Homeworld Gate, and Sigil it. If effective, on the nights of the Immaculatan full moon (which is the Homeworld new moon), a Gate will open to the corresponding coordinates on Homeworld. Thus, instead of there being a month between transport windows, there would be only 15 days!

OPTION: Annexing Immaculata Colony

This CiaB could be "bolted on" to an extant campaign, simply through the introduction of Grimfalk and its unique and almost degenerate style of magic, Sigilry. Merely tuck it away in a disused corner of your setting; since Grimfalk is almost totally politically and militarily inoffensive, it shouldn't shake up a campaign's geopolitics. However, the discovery of the Gate and Immaculata certainly will. An interesting campaign could be played from the outside -- agents of a foreign land (the PCs) becoming intrigued by mysteries and wonders in a small backwater country . . . and possibly even (by accident or design) traveling through the Gate into a new world.

Exploration: The watchword of exploration is "discovery." There should be new things to see, interesting places to go, strange creatures or features around every corner. Don't shortchange your players with lackluster description -- make sure you give each new panorama a full set of sensory images: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. This is a new world, fresh, untouched . . . make them realize that they are the first people to ever see it. And let them find some neat, weird, rewarding stuff, like cave-dwelling land-scallops that make good eating, birds with "armor" woven out of straw, a plant that salves wounds, nuggets of gold in the stream, etc. Then, give them the explorer's prerogative: the honor of naming the thing or place.

Colonization: Successful colonization demands careful planning and management, as well as great expense and risk. Settlers have to be selected, preferably those with useful skills, and they require utensils, clothing, seed, tools, building materials, livestock, weapons, and armor. As soon as the settlers arrive, they need a place to live and food to eat. Unexpected calamities may waste their resources, weaken them, or even kill them. Resource management is thus key, and many players find roleplaying the meticulous planning needed to prosper as colonists entertaining. However, some players may find this sort of thing dry as dust -- or even worse, frustrating as they do not feel like they can adequately plan for every possibility. Pay close attention to your players, and adjust the level of detail required.

Other Resources

- Diamond, Jared. [*Guns, Germs, & Steel.*](#)
- ["Instructions for the Virginia Colony \(1606\)"](#)
- Lewis CS. [*The Magician's Nephew.*](#)
- [*The Last of the Mohicans.*](#)
- [*Princess Mononoke.*](#)

It's How You Plague The Game

Determining How A Cataclysmic Contagion Affects Your Game World

by James Ryan

The campaign is now going into dark territory, the GM decides. In the last adventure, the heroes failed to stop their nemesis from starting his vile plan, to infect the world with a contagion, and the fruits of his labor will be bitter indeed. Next adventure, the GM decides, the plague will start slowly, and as it spreads, its effect will be . . . will be . . .

Just how do you game an outbreak, anyway?

When the topic of disease comes up in an RPG, invariably the discussion is how a disease affects a single character. When a game *does* talk about a major contagion, it's usually mentioned in the background notes as having already occurred. There is a shortage of material on what a character can expect if they are in the midst of a major outbreak, and how the GM can run the effects of the outbreak as it eats away at the game world. Whether it be in a modern setting, or in an SF/Fantasy milieu, the following guidelines should help a GM determine exactly how a rampant disease affects the world as it ravages the populace.

To best gauge the effects of a runaway infection, the GM will need the use of a spreadsheet program. MS Excel, for example, does a wonderful job of projecting out running calculations, though any program with drag-and-drop capability will work well. As most computers contain spreadsheets as part of their basic software packages, getting and mastering such a program should not be a problem. (For the purpose of example, formulae as they would be entered into MS Excel will be used here.)

It should be determined at the beginning if the disease you are going to inflict on your game world is going to infect the player characters as well. While there is nothing to keep you from making the characters sick, it's assumed in this article that, with the rest of the world around them falling apart, the characters will have their hands full as it is, and don't need the additional burden of catching a deadly disease. It's assumed that somehow the characters are immune to the contagion, which makes them hale and hearty enough to deal with the real crisis, a society that's falling apart around them.

1. Determine Your Population Pool

The first step is to figure out how virulent the disease you are running is going to be, which means how large a population is going to be affected by this bug. In addition to providing the total number of people affected by the disease, this major step also determines how much the campaign is going to be affected by this action. For instance, if the disease only affects a single city, the immediate milieu will be impacted but the rest of the world will try and carry on, which means the players can move elsewhere after the disease has run its course. On the other hand, a global infection would change the direction and main focus of the campaign.

For the example illustrated here, the GM decides he wants something truly hideous and world-changing, a campaign-altering global plague. His population pool in the game, our modern day, is assumed to be an even six billion people.

2. Determine The Characteristics Of The Disease

At this point, a few details about the disease should be determined, such as:

- a. *How likely is it to spread once you have it?* For this, you would need to determine the percentage chance that someone could catch the disease from another person. Unless there's hard data about a particular disease on

hand, the GM should make an educated guess here. Generally the more contagious the disease, the higher the percentage of spreading from victim to victim.

- b. *How much exposure does a person need to an infected individual to catch it?* This is measured in the amount of time a person would have to be with another person to catch it, often measured in days. (Time can also be measured in longer units, such as weeks, although the longer the period the less likely such a disease becomes a threat, as physicians will have more time to try and find then use a cure for the bug.)
- c. *What is the disease's incubation period?* This measures how many days after infection a person can go before symptoms appear. If symptoms are automatic, there's no measurable incubation, although a disease with no chance to build up in a person's body can be detected quickly and treated more effectively, making it less of a threat.
- d. *How fatal is the infection?* If not fatal, what exactly does it do to its victims? The question here is, what percent of those infected are going to be terminal, and how long will it be for someone to be terminal after showing symptoms? While the main assumption is that any gamed plague is fatal, in some campaigns this may not apply. Possible variations include blindness, paralysis, and dementia, while extreme versions may infect patients with lecherousness, petrification, transmutation into mice or some other wild but debilitating effect likely to cause chaos.
- e. *Are there any other effects that some patients suffer?* If not, this need not be considered, but there might be a few victims who react differently to the disease. Examples are extreme madness, granting superpowers or psionic abilities, or turning the victims into dragons. Such alternate effects should make these victims potential threats to the characters, and add an additional obstacle to be overcome in the campaign.

Using the above, the GM in our example decides the following:

- a. There is a thirty-five percent (35%) chance of catching the disease from an infected individual.
- b. Exposure periods where the disease can be caught are measured in a single day.
- c. The disease has a twenty day incubation period.
- d. Death occurs in ninety-nine point five percent (99.5%) of all cases five days after the onset of symptoms.
- e. In addition to the above, two-tenths of a percent (0.2%) of some victims after five days have their genetic code rearranged, becoming stronger and swifter but unable to withstand exposure to direct sunlight and ravenous for human blood.

3. Plot Your Disease

With the above assumptions made, it's time to plot the effects of the disease. Have a column for your exposure period, the number of infected, the number showing symptoms, the number of fatalities (or in the final stage of the disease, as mentioned above), and if included the numbers showing other effects. Each row of the chart measures a single exposure period. Thus, using the above example (with tabs for the rows and columns of the spreadsheet labeled), a chart would be set up as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Day	Infected	Infect Rate	Symptomatic	Fatal	Other
2	1	1	.35			
3	2					
4	3					
5	4					

Note in the above that we fill in the rate of infection and we assume a single infected case (a "patient zero") to start with. This individual would be the sole case on day one. For the second day, we would calculate how many more people are sick by plugging in the following formula in the cell beneath that:

$$=B2+(B2*(1+C2))$$

Note that what's being asked is that there is a 35-percent increase in the number of people with the disease over and above what there had been the day before. Note also that by using this formula for the next day, the spread of this disease is cumulative; thus:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Day	Infected	Infect Rate	Symptomatic	Fatal	Other
2	1	1	.35			
3	2	2	.35			
4	3	6	.35			
5	4	13	.35			

Under this example, thirteen people now have a disease that is not affecting their lives in any way, until the incubation period has passed (which in our example would have the formula "=B2" entered into cell D21), as noted below:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Day	Infected	Infect Rate	Symptomatic	Fatal	Other
21	20	11,227,633	.35	1		
22	21	26,385,009	.35	2		
23	22	62,004,771	.35	6		
24	23	145,711,212	.35	13		

Note that in the above, when the first symptoms start showing up (which may look like another disease, such as the flu, and may not be detected), by then the disease has already taken hold in a large part of the population. Five days later, when the first fatalities show up (reflected on the chart with the formula "=D21*0.995" in cell E26) and the potential for new threats arrives (reflected with the formula "=D21*0.002" in cell F26), the chart would look something like this:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Day	Infected	Infect Rate	Symptomatic	Fatal	Other
26	25	804,690,127	.35	72	1	0
27	26	1,891,021,893	.35	168	2	0
28	27	4,443,901,448	.35	396	5	0
29	28	6,000,000,000	.35	930	13	0
30	29	6,000,000,000	.35	2,186	30	0

As can be seen in the above, the number of infected is frozen at six billion; as this is the total population affected by the contagion, the GM must artificially plug in this amount here so as to make sure that later calculations are not thrown off with imaginary numbers.

As the campaign continues, the above numbers in the last three columns will increase, to the point where the outbreak will crest with the following results:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Day	Infected	Infect Rate	Symptomatic	Fatal	Other
46	45	6,000,000,000	0.35	1,891,021,893	26,253,084	52,770
47	46	6,000,000,000	0.35	4,443,901,448	61,694,747	124,010
48	47	6,000,000,000	0.35	6,000,000,000	144,982,656	291,422
49	48	6,000,000,000	0.35	6,000,000,000	340,709,241	684,843
50	49	6,000,000,000	0.35	6,000,000,000	800,666,716	1,609,380

51	50	6,000,000,000	0.35	6,000,000,000	1,881,566,783	3,782,044
52	51	6,000,000,000	0.35	6,000,000,000	4,421,681,941	8,887,803
53	52	6,000,000,000	0.35	6,000,000,000	5,970,000,000	12,000,000
54	53	6,000,000,000	0.35	6,000,000,000	5,970,000,000	12,000,000
55	54	6,000,000,000	0.35	6,000,000,000	5,970,000,000	12,000,000

Note how after day 52 of the outbreak, there is no further progress, as the disease has run its course throughout the entire population. At this point, the campaign would turn to the aftermath of the disease's ravages. However, as we are concentrating on the effect of the disease as it is happening, there are still a few calculations to be made to determine what's going on during the outbreak.

4. Determine The Effect of the Illness Upon Society

Once we know how many people are being made sick on any given day of the outbreak, we can then determine how likely all this sick time taken en masse will impact the life of the players. For that, an additional calculation will need to be made, called the "Effectiveness %" which calculates what percentage of the population is not feeling ill. This is determined as follows:

$$(\text{total population} - \text{symptomatic population}) / \text{total population} = \%$$

This percentage can be used as a roll by the GM to determine if a particular service is still being offered or a particular set of goods can be acquired. The higher the percentage, the more likely the players will succeed in getting what they wish. The percentage can also be used as a gauge for what is or isn't likely to be available, as suggested below:

Effectiveness %	Effect
<i>Greater than 85%</i>	Small shortages possibly noticed, such as a character's favorite candy bar not being for sale at the corner, or finding longer lines than usual at the fast food restaurants because there's not enough people to man the register.
<i>85% - 60%</i>	Impact is definitely noticeable, such as closing of some restaurants and boutiques, changes in schedules for airlines and railroads, shortages of groups of non-essential items throughout the area, and changes in live programming with substitute personalities on the air.
<i>59% - 40%</i>	Serious impacts felt, such as longer response time before fire and police units show up, food and gas shortages regionally, television and radio going strictly to automated programming (if not pre-empted by wall-to-wall news).
<i>39% - 15%</i>	Insurmountable stresses to social network prominent, felt through water and power failures of indeterminate length (the lower the percentage, the longer the breakdown period) and areas of anarchy where no order is present or apparent. What authority there is will be concentrating solely on crisis management, and may find itself unable meet even those needs.
<i>Less than 15%</i>	Total anarchy as civilization comes to a crashing halt. From this point on, you're fully on your own.

Note that player characters have a chance of affecting this percentage by anywhere up to 10 percentage points through their actions if they apply themselves as pillars of a community. By organizing citizens' brigades and offering good examples and comfort to neighbors, players can increase the Effectiveness % and mitigate the effects of society falling apart, if only slightly. Conversely, characters who spread panic and engage in acts of anarchy can actually decrease the Effectiveness % and hasten the fall.

Note also that in societies that have emergency measures they can call on (such as martial law), there's a chance that these steps will be taken equal to (100%-Effectiveness %). Thus, the less a society can meet its obligations, the greater the chance it will mobilize the troops to take over, although how effective this step will be will depend on the size of the overall population (discussed below).

In our example, we calculate the Effectiveness % with the formula in cell G2 being " $= (6000000000 - D2) / 6000000000$ " and enter this formula down the rest of the column. We then format the column to return the number as a percentage, which should produce results as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Day	Infected	Infect Rate	Symptomatic	Fatal	Other	Effectiveness %
40	39	6,000,000,000	0.35	11,227,663	155,874	313	100%
41	40	6,000,000,000	0.35	26,385,009	366,303	736	100%
42	41	6,000,000,000	0.35	62,004,771	860,813	1,730	99%
43	42	6,000,000,000	0.35	145,711,212	2,022,911	4,066	98%
44	43	6,000,000,000	0.35	342,421,348	4,753,840	9,555	94%
45	44	6,000,000,000	0.35	804,690,167	11,171,525	22,455	87%
46	45	6,000,000,000	0.35	1,891,021,893	26,253,084	52,770	68%
47	46	6,000,000,000	0.35	4,443,901,448	61,694,74	124,010	26%
48	47	6,000,000,000	0.35	6,000,000,000	144,982,656	291,422	0%
49	48	6,000,000,000	0.35	6,000,000,000	340,709,241	684,843	0%

Note in the above following our example that civilization holds out pretty well for over a month, but when the number of people showing symptoms hits a critical mass, then the end of civilization as we know it comes quickly and without mercy, taking only a week for the world to sink into total barbarism.

A further, perhaps obvious, calculation should also be made, the percentage of people who are healthy. This percentage, in addition to determining both how much the population density in an area has declined and the likelihood of running into another person at random when needed, also measures the effective strength of what response the institutions mobilizing to meet the crisis can bring to bear, such as the National Guard. This is calculated as follows:

$$(\text{total population} - \text{population that has reached terminal phase}) / \text{total population} = \%$$

Note that the above formula takes into account all affected people, both those who have died (or affected likewise) and those who may have been changed, as it is assumed that these later individuals will no longer be upholding a regular routine in their new forms.

Going back to our example, to measure the "Survive %" we enter the following formula into cell H2, " $= (6000000000 - (E2 + F2)) / 6000000000$ " and enter this formula down the rest of the column. We then format the column to return the number as a percentage, which should produce results as follows:

	A	D	E	F	G	H
1	Day	Symptomatic	Fatal	Other	Effectiveness %	Survive %
40	39	11,227,663	155,874	313	100%	100%
41	40	26,385,009	366,303	736	100%	100%
42	41	62,004,771	860,813	1,730	99%	100%
43	42	145,711,212	2,022,911	4,066	98%	100%
44	43	342,421,348	4,753,840	9,555	94%	100%
45	44	804,690,167	11,171,525	22,455	87%	100%

46	45	1,891,021,893	26,253,084	52,770	68%	100%
47	46	4,443,901,448	61,694,747	124,010	26%	99%
48	47	6,000,000,000	144,982,656	291,422	0%	98%
49	48	6,000,000,000	340,709,241	684,843	0%	94%
50	49	6,000,000,000	800,666,716	1,609,380	0%	87%
51	50	6,000,000,000	1,881,566,783	3,782,044	0%	69%
52	51	6,000,000,000	4,421,681,941	8,887,803	0%	26%
53	52	6,000,000,000	5,970,000,000	12,000,000	0%	0%

From the above, we can see that if the National Guard were called out on Day 43, the unit would be at full capacity, but within three days the effectiveness of the unit would start to waver in the face of total collapse (due to sickness, losses in the field while trying to maintain order, possibly desertion). By Day 49, the unit would be noticeably impaired, and by Day 52 the unit would cease to function, the survivors most likely disbanding after the contagion and chaos claimed the rest.

Note also that in the above, while the percentage of survivors is nil, mathematically there are still 30 million healthy normal left on the face of the planet (not to mention 12 million monsters). These individuals will now make up the NPCs in the game, all with stories of their own to tell about the crisis, and it will be the search for and interaction with these people that will now be the focus of the campaign.

Variations On A Threat

The above, of course, is an abstraction of the actual effects of a major debilitating outbreak. While this model provides a simple but straightforward guide to assessing the progress of a disease, there are ways to modify the above as desired for your campaign:

- **Affecting the Infection Rate:** Some GMs may decide that the chance of catching the disease is variable, perhaps very unlikely at first, then more likely as the viruses mutate and adapt to human immune systems. GMs may assign a different infection rate as they wish.
- **The Need for Contact:** The GM may want to rule that the disease requires close face-to-face interaction to spread. In addition to making the infection rate small to begin with, this could also be affected by the Effectiveness %, which means that as society falls apart, the spread of the disease is slowed. This is calculated as noted below:

$$\text{Base Rate of Infection} \times \text{Effectiveness \%} = \text{Current Rate of Infection}$$

- **Calling Doctor Cleric!:** If the player characters are world-class physicians, holy clerics with powerful magic, superheroes with incredible healing powers, or other such abilities, they can have an impact on reducing the infection rate. The GM may reduce the infection rate at his discretion for every exposure period the character is actively fighting the disease. Note that in order to have a major impact, the player will be doing very little else except working/healing, sleeping and eating, so if the player goes chasing after another lead, the disease can continue unabated, which may provide the player with a moral dilemma.
- **Germ Hunters:** The above model in this article assumed that the disease was allowed to take root without the players being involved until it was too late. A campaign could be built around players who are made aware of the disease before the incubation period claims its first victim, allowing players to find and deal with (hopefully by curing) any infected individuals they run down.

An example is given below of such a plot, where the formula in cell B3 would be entered as "=B2+(B2*(1+C2))-D3" and then extended down the length of the column to reflect that while the disease is still running through the population, every time the players find and handle an infected individual they have reduced the spread:

	A	B	C	D
1	Day	Infected	Infect Rate	"Handled"
2	1	1	0.35	
3	2	2	0.35	
4	3	2	0.35	1
5	4	3	0.35	
6	5	3	0.35	1
7	6	4	0.35	
8	7	3	0.35	2
9	8	5	0.35	
10	9	5	0.35	1
11	10	7	0.35	

In such a game the spread of the contagion is entirely in the player's hands, although even if they vigorously pursue the disease it may still end up being a losing battle in the end.

- **Same Bug, Different Groups = Different Effects:** The GM might decide that different populations are affected at different rates or in different ways. Examples include a disease which kills humans that is only half as likely to kill orcs, or a country that might have created the plague bug has inoculated its people for some protection, lessening the infection rate in that region. GMs wanting this extra layer of complexity may have to lay out more than one spreadsheet which may have to have the data between the different sets linked in order to get a full picture of the disease's effects. This step is only recommended if both the players and the GM want to run in a hyper-realistic setting.

Suggested Readings

- McNeill, William, *Plagues And Peoples* (Anchor press, 1976): This seminal historical survey demonstrates the impact of diseases on whole societies. A must-read for GMs wanting to examine the impact of disease on a campaign.
- Preston, Richard, *The Hot Zone* (Random House, 1994): Factual account of an Ebola outbreak near Washington, and a primer on how modern governments respond to deadly contagions.
- Camus, Albert, *The Plague* (A.A. Knopf, 1948): A classic novel looking at the toil on a society as disease ravages an Algerian city.
- King, Steven, *The Stand* (Doubleday, 1978 and 1990): Probably the most famous modern novel looking at the effects of a bio-agent being released on the US. The revised edition expands on the examination of the disease as it runs through the population.
- Matheson, Richard, *I Am Legend* (Fawcett, 1954): A classic work and an examination of a disease that turns its victims into vampires (as an alternative to the usual effects of infection). Became the basis for two movies: *The Last Man On Earth* (Ubaldo Ragona and Sidney Salkow, 1964) and *The Omega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971).

Suggested Web Pages for Additional Information

- Center for Disease Control -- <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- John Hopkins University's Center for Civilian Biodefense Strategies -- <http://www.hopkins-biodefense.org/index.html>

Admiral Sir Edward Pellew, Viscount Exmouth

by Mark Gellis

Sir Edward Pellew can hardly mind becoming an NPC for *GURPS*, since he has been Horatio Hornblower's NPC for nearly a century. Yes . . . Hornblower. If you have read the novels, you know that Pellew was his captain and mentor for many years. But if you thought he was simply a figment of C. S. Forester's nautical imagination, you were wrong. Pellew was quite real. He was also quite extraordinary. And this is how he can figure into a campaign set during the Age of Sail . . .

A Short Biographical Sketch

Pellew spent most of his life in the Royal Navy. Born in 1757, he joined the Navy at the age of 13. He rose steadily in the ranks due for the most part to his intelligence, hard work, and personal courage, and to a smaller degree his ability to work the English patronage system. He saw action during the American Revolution, was promoted to the rank of Captain by the time he was 25, and was knighted and eventually created a lord for his service to the crown. The following timeline shows the highlights of his life:

- **1757:** Born in Dover on April 19
- **1770:** Enters the Royal Navy, serves aboard *H.M.S. Juno*, described by Parkinson (1934) as "a sixth rate of thirty-two guns" (chap. 1, para. 14).
- **1776:** Serves aboard *HMS Blonde*, a frigate of 36 guns; sees action at Lake Champlain.
- **1778:** Appointed fourth lieutenant on the guard ship *HMS Princess Amelia* and then second lieutenant aboard the frigate *HMS La Licorne*.
- **1780:** Captain Philemon Pownoll, Pellew's former commander on *HMS Blonde*, offers him the appointment of first lieutenant on the *HMS Apollo*; Pellew accepts immediately and serves with Pownoll until the latter is killed that June in action against the French frigate *Stanislaus*. Pellew takes command of the badly damaged *Apollo*, defeats the *Stanislaus*, and then brings his ship to port for repairs; during the fall, Pellew is placed in command of the *Hazard*, an aged sloop with "eight or ten guns" (Parkinson, chap. 3, para. 34), and unsuccessfully patrols the Yorkshire coast for smugglers.
- **1782:** Promoted to Captain; serves briefly on various ships until the end of the Revolutionary War.
- **1783:** With the Revolutionary War over, Pellew moves to Truro (located in Cornwall) to be near his elder brother Samuel; he marries Susannah Frowde, the daughter of a local country squire, on May 28 of that year (their fifty-year marriage appears to have been a happy one); Pellew becomes a magistrate and alderman in Truro under the patronage of Viscount Falmouth.
- **1786:** Takes command of the *Winchelsea*, a frigate of 32 guns; during the next two years, he patrols off Newfoundland and in the Channel, but without seeing much action.
- **1793:** France declares war on England; Pellew takes command of the *HMS Nymph*, a 36-gun frigate, with his younger brother Israel aboard as a volunteer. Pellew captures the French frigate *Cleopatre*. By happy chance, this was the first victorious engagement of the war and Pellew is knighted by George III.
- **1794:** Promoted to Commodore of the Western Frigate Squadron; takes command of the *HMS Indefatigable*, a large, fast frigate of unusual design (originally she was a 64-gun ship cut down to frigate size, ultimately carrying about 44 guns).
- **1796:** While visiting home, Pellew sees the merchantman Dutton wreck on the Plymouth coast; he organizes rescue operations and saves more than five hundred people; George III makes Pellew a baronet (a hereditary knight whose title is passed on in perpetuity) for his heroism; during this year, Pellew is involved in operations to assist the revolt in Brittany against the First Republic and various operations against French frigates.
- **1799:** Pellew takes command of *Impetueux*, a powerful ship of 74 guns; he quells a mutiny on the vessel in May of that year.
- **1800:** Pellew supervises the successful attack on Belle Island off the French coast.
- **1801:** Commands the squadron-blockading *Rochefort*.

- **1802:** Elected to Parliament.
- **1804:** Promoted to Rear Admiral (Military Rank 7) and appointed Commander-in-Chief East Indies Fleet. His flagship is the *Culloden*, a 74-gun ship; Pellew remains in the East Indies for five years, and returns to England in 1809 after a relatively uneventful tour of duty.
- **1810:** Appointed Commander-in-Chief of the North Sea; his flagship is the *Christian VII*; his primary mission during this period is to blockade the *Scheldt*.
- **1811:** Appointed Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean; his primary mission is to blockade the French fleet at Toulon. His flagship is the *Caledonia*, at the time "the biggest ship ever built in an English dockyard" (Parkinson, chap. 11, para. 21), with 120 guns and a crew of 900; however, the French rarely attempt to run the blockade, leaving Pellew with little to do but sit and watch them for next three years.
- **1815:** Returns to England, settles at Teignmouth and creates Baron Exmouth; recalled to active service as Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean to fight the slave trade in the Mediterranean. His flagship during this period is the *Boyne*, and then the *Queen Charlotte*, vessels of 98 and 100 guns respectively.
- **1816:** Pellew returns to England after a successful campaign against the Algerian corsairs (piracy does continue in the area, with the strongholds he attacks being rebuilt, but Pellew does effectively end the enslavement of Christians by Barbary pirates); created Viscount Exmouth; he never goes to sea again.
- **1832:** Appointed Vice Admiral of the United Kingdom.
- **1833:** Dies at Bitton House, his home at Teignmouth, and buried at Christow.

While the above reveals Pellew's accomplishments, they tell us little about the man himself. A few incidents should be enough to reveal his character. The first thing that strikes one about Pellew is that he was an intelligent and perceptive man. As an example, in 1815, while fighting the slave trade in the Mediterranean, he was ordered to attack a corsair stronghold in Algiers. Even before he had received the order, however, he had anticipated that this was a likely course of action for the navy and had sent one of his captains to survey the enemy defenses. This let him formulate a strategy that allowed for a quick and decisive victory.

Pellew was also active in his community and personally generous. After settling in Teignmouth, and having been raised to the rank of viscount, he became a generous benefactor of various local causes, including rebuilding a local church.

What truly distinguishes him, however, is not only his desire to help others but also his courage. On several occasions during his years as a naval officer, he leapt overboard to rescue drowning sailors, often when the situation seemed so hopeless that people believed both the sailor and Pellew would drown.

The event for which he is perhaps most famous outside of his appearance in the *Hornblower* novels also reveals his courage and selflessness, his rescue of the crew and passengers of the *Dutton*. In 1796, Pellew and his wife were in their carriage, on their way to dinner with a friend, when they saw a ship being driven into Plymouth Sound by a ferocious winter storm. The ship ran aground on the coast, and everyone still aboard was in danger of drowning or being dashed to pieces on the rocks. Pellew made his way to the shore and found the officers of the vessel, who had abandoned everyone else on board to their fates. When they refused to return to the vessel, Pellew made his way to the ship and took charge himself, despite having injured his back while doing so. In the end, he saved more than five hundred men, women, and children. The King, who had knighted him in 1793 for his prowess as a captain, made him a baronet for his heroism.

All of this points to a man who was intelligent, skilled, generous, selfless, courageous, and capable of decisive action without being guilty of undue rashness. When there was time to plan carefully, he did so; when quick action was needed, he provided it.

Pellew had his flaws. He was a man of strict -- even harsh -- discipline. However, while he may have been harsher than some naval commanders in how he punished the offenses of his crew, he never went beyond the boundaries of what was considered acceptable in his culture. His greatest flaw as a leader was that he did not like to delegate tasks to junior officers and, as a result, not only had to work harder to accomplish things when he was an admiral but probably failed to gain as high a degree of loyalty and devotion from his subordinates as he might have gained if he had given them more authority. He was, in short, a good leader, but not a great one.

There is also the matter of what we might consider political corruption. In the Age of Sail, if a man wanted to advance in the military, he often needed a patron and he often needed to either charm that patron with gifts (Pellew frequently bought wine for people he wanted to influence) or trade political favors in return for support and influence. Pellew relied on Viscount Falmouth and other nobles at various times in his career in exactly this way. To him, it was not corruption; it was simply how business got done. It was also how everyone else did business, including his rivals for military appointments, so even if Pellew had been disgusted with the British system of patronage, he had little choice but to go along with it. Again, he never went beyond what would have been considered the boundaries of decency for his time.

And it might be better, in any event, to judge him by other things. He was a loving brother, husband, and father. He was an officer who cared for his men even if he did sometimes treat them harshly. He was a soldier who was devoted to his country. And he was a man who came to the aid of those who were in danger, even when they were total strangers, and even when it meant risking his own life.

Pellew in *GURPS* (375 points)

ST 12 [20], **DX** 12 [20], **IQ** 13 [30], **HT** 14 [45]

Advantages: Ally Group (crew and subordinate officers, treat as large group, 15-) [90], Fearlessness +3 [6], Legal Enforcement Powers (vs. nautical criminals) [5], Luck [15], Military Rank 6 [30], Patron (Lord Chatham, etc., powerful individual, 9-) [10], Reputation +1 [5], Status +3 [5]*, Strong Will +1 [4], Wealth: Very Wealthy [30]

*includes two free levels of Status from Military Rank

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (British Officer and Gentleman) [-10], Duty (to England, 15-) [-15], Vow ("Never leave someone to die if there is a chance of rescuing him") [-10], Unattractive [-5]

Quirks: Hates idleness [-1], Loves his wife and family [-1], Politically conservative [-1], Strict disciplinarian who may have sailors severely flogged for crimes like drunkenness or disobedience [-1], Willing to trade political favors to get what he wants [-1]

Skills: Administration-14 [4], Area Knowledge (Atlantic Ocean)-14 [1], Area Knowledge (Cornwall)-14 [1], Area Knowledge (English Channel)-14 [1], Area Knowledge (Mediterranean)-14 [1], Area Knowledge (North Sea)-14 [1], Bard-12 [1], Black Powder Weapons (Flintlock Musket)-14 [1], Black Powder Weapons (Flintlock Pistol)-14 [1], Black Powder Weapons (Flintlock Rifle)-14 [1], Boating-14 [8], Diplomacy-12 [2], Gunner (Cannon)-14 [4], Law-11 [1], Leadership-14 [4], Navigation-14 [6], Politics-12 [1], Riding (Horse)-12 [2], Sailor-15 [6], Savior-Faire-14 [1], Savior-Faire (Military)-14 [1], Seamanship-14 [1], Shiphandling-14 [6], Shortsword (Cutlass)-14 [4], Swimming-14 [4], Strategy (Land)-14 [6], Strategy (Naval)-17 [12], Tactics (Marine)-16 [10], Tactics (Naval)-17 [12], Writing-12 [1]

Languages: English-13 [0]

This shows Sir Edward from around 1793 to 1804. After 1804, he is a Rear Admiral (and a Vice Admiral after 1808), which gives him Military Rank 7; after 1805, he would have Area Knowledge (Indian Ocean)-14. After 1807, he would have the Age disadvantage at the standard rate of three points per year; in addition, his ST should be reduced to 10 and his HT should be reduced to 12 due to illnesses and other physical hardships endured during his years in the East Indies. After 1815, he is a baron and, after 1816, a viscount, raising his Status to +4; he also gains Area Knowledge (Devon)-14.

Pellew is listed as only having one patron because he relied on different political allies at different times in his life. Pellew's political enemies (e.g., Pitt) have not been listed as a disadvantage because they did not act against him very often (although they did divide his command in the East Indies, something that Pellew had actually expected them to do, so he was prepared for it) and including them would have brought the number of points for disadvantages above the maximum of 40.

It may seem odd that a gentleman like Pellew knows no French, but Parkinson claims that English was his only language. It is not entirely surprising, of course, because Pellew did not go to a university or even what we would consider a secondary school; he joined the navy at the age of thirteen and spent his entire life in it.

Using Sir Edward In A Campaign

Pellew would make an excellent patron for player characters. He is a gentleman, honorable, and unswerving in his loyalty to England. He is a bit rigid and unforgiving of laxness, moral failure, disobedience, and tyranny (he thought Napoleon should have been executed rather than sent off to exile), but these are hardly unusual characteristics for a British naval officer of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Because of his point value, his base value as a patron is 15 points.

One campaign seed would be to have PCs who are sailors or junior officers serving with Pellew as their commanding officer, in effect recreating some of the Hornblower stories. One might need to bend history a little, as there were long periods during his career when he served effectively but saw little action, but there were always spies, pirates, smugglers, and other unsavory characters to deal with during this period, even in peacetime.

Pellew might also show up if one sets a campaign in Cornwall during the 1790s. Pellew was socially and politically active in his community and, while he was personally honest, he was also loyal to his political friends. If any of these are involved in the action of the story, Pellew may appear to further their interests, one way or another. As Pellew serves as a magistrate during much of the time when he lived in Truro, he would retain the same level of legal enforcement powers, although the jurisdiction would change. In fact, one good possibility for a campaign would be to have the characters investigating smugglers, spies, or, in a horror campaign, occult activities in Cornwall, with Pellew serving as the magistrate to whom the adventurers report.

A similar campaign is possible in the very early years of the Steampunk era. Once Pellew, now Viscount Exmouth, retires from active duty in 1816, he has little to do, but he did not think very much of the radical reform efforts at large in the country in the 1820s. An alternate history might have Lord Exmouth placed in charge of a Tory effort to investigate sedition and espionage (with or without occult elements) in Devon and Cornwall during this period; the PCs could serve as his agents.

Another option is to set the campaign in the Indian Ocean. Changes in the British government during the time when Pellew served in this region allow for adventures involving not only naval action but also political intrigue. Campaigns with fantastic elements are also possible. Perhaps dinosaurs have somehow survived in the wilds of Sumatra. Or perhaps the dark magic of some fanatical cult is at work in Madras. And there is no reason why one of the Nicobar Islands might not be a stronghold of some ancient and unnatural horror.

Pellew also makes a very good enemy if players wish to play characters who are French, Americans, Algerian pirates, and so on. Because he is not only a highly capable man but a courageous and decent one as well, he may make an interesting change from the run-of-the-mill arrogant British fop one frequently finds cast as the bad guy. As an enemy, Sir Edward himself has a base value of -10 points. For those characters whose enemy is the British Navy rather than Pellew himself (even if it is Pellew who shows up as an agent of the British Navy), that organization has a base value of -30 points.

Finally, Pellew can be used as a template for similar characters in other campaigns. He could easily be adapted into a naval officer for the French, Dutch, Spanish, or Americans during the Age of Sail by changing his patron, area knowledge skills, and so on. In the same way, he could be used in virtually any time period from 1400 to 1900 with relatively few changes, most of them being in weapon, vehicle, and area knowledge skills. Another change might be to add one or two levels of Charisma. Pellew was a leader because he was smart, capable, and courageous, but he does not appear to have had much animal magnetism; other leaders might be quite different. Even in fantasy campaigns, Pellew would remain relatively unchanged; he is unlikely to study magic himself but would instead employ wizards to gather intelligence, control the weather, and the like.

Resources

Pellew is the subject of a 1934 biography by Parkinson, long out of print, but available online at <http://www.pellew.com/Exmouth/Exmouth.htm>. The book describes not only his exploits in combat, but also provides extensive details on the political intrigues of the period. Some of Pellew's exploits are also described in *Broadsides: The Age of Fighting Sail, 1775-1815*, by Nathan Miller, published in 2000 by John Wiley & Sons.

Things We'd Gladly Take For Granted, If Only They Existed

I was in the drug store today, picking up some wrapping paper to wrap Christmas gifts; I have managed to delude myself into thinking I would have time to wrap presents. As I'm there, I notice the plethora of last-minute gift ideas . . . the kind of low-rent (if not necessarily low-price) items one finds in such a place, designed to target the "holy-cow-the-eggnog's-worn-off-and-I-haven't-bought-my-wife-whatsername-anything-yet-oh-well-this-giant-headed-animatronic-Louis-Armstrong-will-do" audience.

One of the desperation gifts at this store was a talking teddy bear, with a microprocessor attached to a speaker that would allow the bear to say 100 random things: "Time for bed!", "How are you?" and so on. Now, besides the fact that I don't have 100 interesting things to say (as long-time readers can surely attest), this merely helped drive how ubiquitous computers and audio processors have become. A mere 60 years ago, having eight minutes of audio (broken into two four-minute blocks) was a major accomplishment. Today we can store several thousand hours of music at a higher quality on a device the size of a pack of cards.

[Two weeks ago](#) I discussed looking at the world through the eyes of, "What do we have or what have we done that has radically changed the world, to the point where we scarcely realize it?" This week we're turning it around: "What accomplishments *don't* we have that could radically change the world?"

Of course, this is a much harder proposition than the previous column. After all, it's one thing to look at your world and ask, "What would things be like if we didn't have television/computers/Chex Party Mix?" It's another to ask, "What *doesn't* the world have that would make a big difference if we did?"

And I'm not even sure I have satisfactory answers. After all, if I could think of things that would change the world, I'd probably be a bit more powerful (unless, of course, the Hidden Masters are instructing me to keep a low profile . . .).

Before we tackle this question, trying to find examples of our nonexistent world-changing ideas, let's look at the meta-issue of how we're going to go about it. As far as coming up with ideas for gaming, there are two obvious approaches:

- Think of something that doesn't exist, postulate that it *does* exist, and then figure out what the world would be like with it.
- Think of what you want the world to be like, then think of what development would push the world toward that history.

The latter is definitely easier, since -- thanks to the miracle of GM Fiat -- you can declare that *any* development will have the desired effect. ("Er, yes . . . in this world, everyone lives to be 100. And why? Uhh . . . because of instant-beverage cooling technology!") Of course, you'll want to make that cause-and-effect as logical as possible, so as not to stretch credulity. But in the end it's perfectly acceptable to use a bit of hand-waving to achieve your desired result.

But that's too easy, as far as we're concerned; we're trying to come up with those alternate worlds or histories that aren't obvious.

Here, then, are a few ideas to get the old creative juices flowing.

Universal Data Format

If there is one thing I suspect that is hampering the information age on a fundamental level, it's that we have a hard time defining what "information" even *is*. Let's take a step back; the development of mathematics was made possible largely because of a firmly defined infrastructure: we have numbers (base 10, for the most part), symbols that are cross-compatible, and definitions that all build from a logical whole. (In fact, speaking from personal experience, I've only gotten in trouble with mathematics when there *has* been a "language drift;" calculus as I learned it in high school

and college math classes, for example, was different from the calculus used in my physics class . . . just enough to be confusing.)

But when it comes to the notion of "data," we have really don't have the same fundamental building blocks. A text file -- one of the simplest theoretical forms of data available -- has at least a dozen common variations across different platforms, all of them (more or less) incompatible. There are several dozen different graphics formats, all with their own quirks, advantages, and drawbacks. Databases . . . audio files . . . compression schemes . . . all limited by fundamental incompatibilities across platforms, formats, and models of computers.

But what if a forward-thinking genius (or group) saw the future of data, and realized that information itself required a fundamental expandable but backwards-compatible language akin to mathematics? Given the number of platforms and data formats out there, it's almost impossible to consider such a reform happening any time soon. But if such a theoretical construct were in place from the beginning, the Information Age would probably have a *vastly* different shape. The notion of different computers with different data formats would be nonexistent; devices would differentiate themselves based on features and how it generated and processed the data, rather than merely its ability to read the data. Given that information would be easily transferable between people, data would probably become more of commodity quicker; digital books, universal transferable audio/video, and other kinds of information would all be more easily available. Most information issues (encryption, copyright, privacy and so on) would probably be hammered out decades earlier. As a random example, consider if medical records were in a universal accessible format; you could keep the information in a sub-dermal chip, encrypted with your own DNA. Then, if you were injured, the medical authorities could extract the necessary information using your own tissue.

Semi-Permanent Reversible Birth Control

Given how much social and political upheaval can be directly attributed to the public availability of the birth control pill in the 1960s (a method of contraception that is, in many ways, less than ideal), what would happen if a *more* fool-proof, unobtrusive, and publicly available means were to be widely available? Although (mostly) theoretical science, it doesn't stretch plausibility much to envision a world where such a means would be available; what would it mean for the world to have a totally reversible, effective, and semi-permanent means of birth control?

For many parts of society it would lead to a reevaluation of many fundamental concepts; when the whole "sex equals babies" equation is fundamentally disrupted, things can go in a number of directions. (This is one of those great "GM Fiat" options, since the way such a development would affect society can pretty much be however you would like after a few generations. Do you want a more sexually open society? Well, then, this medical advance becomes widely accepted. Do you want a *less* open society? Well, those who *don't* believe in such a technology may well have more children than those who do, swaying the public (and legislative) world.

For the "radically-different-but-almost-plausible," you may postulate a world where, say, a universal birth control is inserted into the water . . . the antidote to which is easily available from any drug store or government facility. Such a society would theoretically have *no* unwanted pregnancies . . . with, again, any number of possible interesting gaming outcomes.

Public Mental Health Care

Finally, let's look at one more. There are some aspects of modern life that we take for granted, which we really have little reason to expect. For example, take the public library. When seriously considered, this is one of the most unlikely institutions, yet it's difficult to envision a free society *without* them. The modern library is specifically designed to give a non-paying public access to many kinds of information and entertainment; in modern times this includes not only books, but also audiobooks, CDs, DVDs, software, Internet access, and a myriad of other services. And, despite many thorny issues involving government censorship versus the need to protect children, intellectual property rights, and the very role of the library in the modern society, they continue to survive. Why? Because at one time enough powerful people believed that it was important for the intellectual health and growth of society, and that belief has continued -- via design or inertia -- to this day. (Andrew Carnegie, for example, was one such early American believer and

contributor in the library system.)

What, then, keeps an alternate universe from having similar public institutions that focuses on something else? For example, what if an early philanthropist recognized the importance of mental health and therapy for society? A long-ago movement to create local community centers devoted to matters of the mind would have the potential of producing a wildly different world; public ignorance and stigma against mental illness (and those who suffer from it) may well be less in such a world. Society could be bolstered by people who would otherwise be worthwhile and productive members, but for their treatable mental problems. A world where people would openly discuss issues of the mind, like depression or anxiety -- in the same way they might discuss cancer or broken bones -- would be radically different. The homeless situation may be lessened, many kinds of possible tragedies might be averted, and serious contemplation of the nature of the mind itself may be publicly widespread, in the way that the nature of knowledge and learning is bolstered by the existence of the public library system.

Of course, given the relative infancy of the psychotherapeutic sciences, some careful contemplation or hand-waving would be necessary to make such a world work. If this institution was set up early enough, it may have evolved out of religious and spiritual counseling. If a relatively recent phenomenon, it may be necessary to fabricate an early successful pioneer in therapy. But still, a myriad of unlikely public services can all be possible in alternate worlds by following the example of the public library.

On the one hand, it's tough to look at the world and discern what's missing. On the other hand, it can be greatly rewarding. As an inventor, Edison used the philosophy of "finding a hole and filling it" to accomplish a great deal. GMs have it even easier; they don't actually have to *do* the inventing or social engineering . . . they just need to think of the idea.

Regardless of what you invent, however, just make sure it's more useful than a phrase-spouting electronic bear.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: ***Knights of the Dinner Table CCG***, Camelot card.

(three stars, or five stars for origin)

"1: David Copperfield [*one cheese*]

...

5: Wassail, Wassail [*two drinks*]"

Pyramid Pick

Mutants & Masterminds RPG (based on *d20 System*)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Steve Kenson

Graphic Design by [Super Unicorn](#)

288-page full-color hardback; \$32.95

And so 2002, the year of the Great Superhero Game Revival, closes with the debut of *Mutants & Masterminds*, the first "massively open content" non-fantasy game to emerge from the shadow of the Wizards of the Coast Open Game License. And emerge it does, in full-color splendor, ready to tackle the daunting world of superhero gaming with a pencil in one hand and a passel of 20-sided dice in the other. Let's see how it measures up.

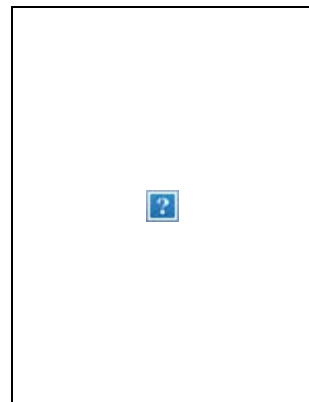
Think about the game engine on which Open Gaming is based, and you're obliged to think about classes and levels. However, *Mutants & Masterminds* does not use classes (unless you infer a single implied "superhero" class). "Levels" refers to Power Levels which serve as a guide to setting character and campaign balance. There are no experience points in the game, but there are Power Points to be earned. An initial allotment of Power Points is used to purchase all character traits (no rolling for Abilities!); more Power Points can be earned in play for character improvement. In essence, *Mutants & Masterminds* is a point-buy character system meshed smoothly into the Open mechanics.

The book follows the fairly standard organization for a core rulebook of this family. An introduction describes the game, provides definitions of terms, and highlights differences between *Mutants & Masterminds* and other similar games. Also in the introduction are a dozen "archetypes," standard hero designs of the usual models seen in comic books. These can be lifted straight out for fast-start play or tweaked and customized for those not interested in building a ground-up character.

Chapters one through six, nearly half the book, present the information needed for creating characters. Players start with a character concept and the Gamemaster's chosen starting Power Level (which determines the number of Power Points available to purchase traits). They spend Power Points on Abilities, Skills, Feats, and Super-Powers, and then add the other characteristics which round out the character's history and personality. (One can also add a Weakness, adding a few more Power Points in exchange for a "touch of vulnerability.") Super-heroes get a new trait, Hero Points, which allows them to temporarily improve their abilities, minimize the effects of damage, alter die rolls, or just get a little inspiration . . . although the GM can have Villains do much the same with his Villain Points pool.

Powers are purchased in ranks (just like Skills); some Powers have a higher cost-per-rank than others. Cost can also be modified by the addition of Power Stunts (specialized Feats intimately tied to the Power), Extras (expanding the capability of the power), and Flaws (reducing the capability of a Power). The inclusion of specific Extras and Flaws for each Power is a powerful design tool, allowing rapid customization of Powers without the need to resort to separate and possibly unworkable common-cost modifiers seen in other systems.

Chapter seven gives several pages on devices: power gadgets, vehicles, bases, and so on, covering all the standard genre concepts and tying them neatly into the *Mutants & Masterminds* rules systems. The ninth chapter is on gamemastering; at barely a dozen pages this may be too brief, but it does contain all the essentials for managing and supporting a campaign. Chapter ten is a short adventure, introducing the player heroes to one another and to Freedom City; it is quite up to Kenson's usual quality adventures.



Let's back up to chapter eight, on combat. Combat rules usually prove the most challenging: do you go more freeform, emphasizing storytelling; or more rigorous, emphasizing a wargame-y tactical feel? The System Reference Document sets some of the latter tone here, but Kenson has safely managed to remove most of the obnoxious features of the combat system while retaining most of the best. Combat in *Mutants & Masterminds* can be map-driven or narrative-driven, as the group desires. Combat options are plentifully described with special attention to genre standards, like the team-up attack. Ample options are suggested for speeding up play. Amazingly, the combat chapter comes in at less than 10 percent of the page count . . . remarkably brief yet admirably thorough.

Mutants & Masterminds makes good on its promise that only one die is needed -- the archetypal d20. How, then, is damage and injury handled, which traditionally uses polyhedral dice rolls and hit points? The answer is: very neatly. *Mutants & Masterminds* adds a new kind of saving throw, a Damage save. When a damaging hit is scored, the victim rolls a Damage save, modified by previous damaging hits; the difficulty varies with the Damage bonuses on the attack. A failed Damage save results in a hit, adding more penalties to future Damage saves. Badly failed Damage saves lead to being rendered unconscious or disabled; attempting further combat after being disabled rapidly leads to a refrigerated cot in the coroner's basement. The new rules are elegant, consistent within the system, and take the nastiest part of the Open standard math out of game-time. (Optional rules describe the use of traditional subdual and hit point damage, still without resorting to polyhedra.)

The book's layout is very clean and complete. Each chapter has a distinctive color scheme that serves understanding without interfering with reading. Design team Super Unicorn assembled art from established pros in the comic book industry, lending a fully authentic feel to the game book; characters from the Freedom City world recur throughout. (Having full-color glossy pages isn't bad for the art, either.) The book also includes two pages of cardstock stand-up counters (you won't want to try photocopying these; [download them](#) from the Green Ronin site), a familiar style two-page [character record sheet](#), plenty of reference tables, and a decent index. The appendix also provides a preview of some of the interesting, not to say creepy, villains from the *Freedom City* setting, coming soon. The book feels slimmer than its page count would suggest, but don't be fooled: there's a powerful game in that trim package.

So, *Mutants & Masterminds* safely avoids the traps of incomplete rules and unfamiliar rules grafted in. Is it the ultimate expression of superhero gaming with the Open game engine? Kenson says this: "*Mutants & Masterminds* is a solid game that I'm very proud of, and I'll gladly stand it up against any other superhero RPG out there. So I encourage folks to try different games, including *Mutants & Masterminds*, and pick the one they have the most fun with because, in the end, that's what it's all about, right?"

Taking a tip from a major comic title of the 1960s, *Mutants & Masterminds* audaciously bills itself as "The World's Greatest Superhero RPG!" I think many gamers will find it to be so. *Mutants & Masterminds* brings a solid superhero adventuring experience to the Open Game standard, retaining all the best parts of that popular game system while bringing in new components that enhance the playing experience. This is the game I would want to write if I were designing for this game system, and I look forward to seeing how it all pulls together in a standard setting when *Freedom City* becomes available in January 2003.

-- Bob Portnell

Pyramid Review

Terra Primate RPG

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Written by Patrick Sweeny with Al Bruno III, CJ Carella, and David F. Chapman

Cover by Jeff Reitz

Illustrated by Storn Cook, Thomas Denmark, Talon Dunning, DW Gross, Jon Hodgson, Chris Keefe, Jason Millet, James Powers, Gregory Price, and George Vasilakos

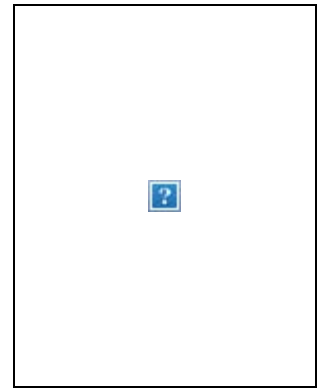
7¼" by 9¼" 256-page hardcover; \$30

With *Terra Primate*, Eden Studios sets out to do for apes and primates what they did for zombies with their [All Flesh Must Be Eaten RPG](#). The format is the same, physically and conceptually, with *Terra Primate* exploring the place of the ape within popular culture and extending them not into "Deadworlds" (as in *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*) but rather into Apeworlds. In *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, the focus is squarely upon humans surviving in a world beset by members of the shuffling corpse cortege, rather than in playing the zombies themselves -- though this has been explored to some extent in the recent [Enter the Zombie](#) supplement. Though the initial focus in *Terra Primate* is upon humans encountering the inhabitants of various Apeworlds, the rules do allow players to take the role of Gorillas, Chimpanzees, Orang-utans, and even Gibbons . . .

As with *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, *Terra Primate* is a sturdy -- but slightly smaller than standard size -- hardback. It is heavily illustrated in a range of different styles, giving it something of a scrappy look. Otherwise, the layout is decent and well-organized, backed up with an excellent index and an appendix of all of the game's charts and tables, as is the norm for an Eden Studios publication. It has also been done with a sense of humor, including a piece of fiction that is a gag upon the idea of a member of a Boy Band going into space via the Russian space program. Another is a humorous twist upon one of the final scenes from *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* and the original *Planet of the Apes*.

Terra Primate uses Eden's Unisystem mechanics, pitching its power levels roughly equal to that of *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*. This allows for some compatibility between the two games, and it would be easy enough to have the players take simian characters facing the challenges presented in the zombie game's many *Deadworlds*, or even be turn the apes into the zombies! There are guidelines to cover this in *Terra Primate*, but the Ape Master -- as the referee is termed in *Terra Primate* -- will require a copy of *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* to do this full justice.

Human characters in *Terra Primate* come in three types, each providing more points to spend on attributes, qualities, and skills . . . and sometimes powers. Pre-Heroic cast members are regular, slightly above-average individuals; Heroic characters are tougher, smarter, and more capable of facing their simian cousins with the constant need for cast member cooperation; and the Powered possess some unusual gift or ability. In *Terra Primate* this is psionics, though magical powers could easily be taken from C.J. Carella's *Witchcraft RPG*, *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, or *Armageddon*. The range of psionic abilities available should satisfy most needs, though Ape Masters wanting more will need to check other Unisystem titles. Creating a character is not a difficult process, but a limited number of archetypes are



included to facilitate a quick game start. The eight given -- Apeman (Tarzan type), Astronaut, Big Game Hunter, Psychic Child, Quantum Physicist, Reformed Genetic Scientist, Reluctant Hero, and Savage Girl -- do require a little customizing before they can be played. This mix does seem very limited and it would have been nice to have a few more, including some generic apes done in the same fashion. That said, the main reason that each archetype needs customization is to individualize them for play in the various Apeworlds, as they come from a variety of genres and a mix of the three character types. It would also have been nice to be given some indication as to which Apeworld each archetype is suited to . . .

Terra Primate's treatment of apes is to present them as a package representing them as we know them from the natural history programs. Each has a cost that is applied to a character type (Pre-Heroic, Heroic, or Powered), with skills, qualities, and drawbacks added to get the desired result. Apes also have their own qualities and drawbacks in addition to those available to just humans. The Ape Master can use any of these to design new templates particular to the Apeworlds they themselves create. The basic, natural packages include four: the Gorilla, the Chimpanzee, the Orang-utan and the Gibbon (though of the four, the Gibbon is little used throughout the various Apeworlds). Also, despite the revisionism of Tim Burton's 2001 remake of the *Planet of the Apes*, *Terra Primate* still draws upon popular culture for its stereotyping of the three main ape types. Thus Gorillas remain as the aggressive and powerful soldiers of any ape society, Orang-utans as its bureaucrats, and Chimpanzees as its intellectuals, much as was seen in the original *Planet of the Apes*.

The chapter on anthropology makes for interesting reading, discussing as it does many of the ideas that will see fruit in the Apeworlds to come. Throughout this chapter, and much of the rest of the book, many of the titles listed in *Terra Primate's* extensive bibliography are referenced, which goes some way to make up for the fact that the titles are only listed in the bibliography and not commented upon. The bibliography includes a listing of many Tarzan movies, a full listing of all of the episodes for *Planet of the Apes* (TV series) and *Planet of the Apes* (animated TV series), plus books, comics and websites.

The nine Apeworlds are given in the same format. They open with a short piece of fiction, then detail the basics of the world and its nature and origins. This includes several options and twists that allow the Ape Master to keep the players on their toes. The physiologies, government, technological capabilities, culture, religion, and opinions of each other are given for both humans and apes. This is backed up by between two and three story ideas for the Ape Master to expand upon, as well as write-ups for the NPC cast members. These include Humans where necessary, which as well as the apes can be created from the templates particular to each Apeworld.

The first of the nine Apeworlds is "Dominant Species," a slightly low-tech take upon the game's primary inspiration, *Planet of the Apes*. It comes with a lot of options for the Ape Master to make it their own, and is perhaps the most flexible of the given settings. "Apeopolis" presents a lost city or Shangri-La of technologically advanced apes sans humanity, which might deep within a mountain range or the Antarctic. This is suited for use as a place to visit irregularly as part of a more fantastic or weird campaign, with the suggested storylines focusing upon the politics behind the facade of this apetopia. The next, "Heart of Africa," is a mixture of Michael Crichton's *Congo* and the pulps of the twenties, taking the cast members deep into the Dark Continent in search of lost temples and the Great White Ape.

"Majestic Ape" is potentially as flexible as "Dominant Species," and is quite close to the *Planet of the Apes* TV series in feel, presenting a feudal society with the apes as the simian nobility and humanity working the fields in serfdom. The Ape Master has the option to give the Chimpanzee-dominated Church of One abilities -- Blessing, Divine Sight and Touch of Healing -- that have limited game effects. Though short, the boxed text on Parallel Civilizations that discusses other historical options to which the Ape Master can apply the Ape paradigm, is very interesting and should give the reader much inspiration. Instead of humanity visiting or invading an Apeworld, "Invasion of the Apes" turns this around and has dimensional portals opening in the midst of the cities across the world, allowing invading armies of apes to pour through and set right our Earth's poor treatment of their next-door dimensional brothers . . . shutting them in cages and the like. With this, the Ape Master can run an Earth-invasion campaign, but with primates instead of aliens or the Soviets as the aggressors. Of all the Ape Worlds this is one of the most instantly accessible, and would be more so if the Ape Master can grab the various archetypes included in *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*.

H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is the inspiration for "The Island of Doctor Monroe," which, though not suited to extended play, could easily serve as the point of origin for the situations in many of the other Apeworlds. One such is "Apeocalypse," a post-apocalyptic Mad Max-style setting that has apes and humans often cooperating in their attempt to rebuild civilization, scavenge from the old, and contend with roving bands of human mutants who may or may not possess psychic powers. Going into other realms is the amusingly named "Simians & Sorcerers," an Apeworld in which an evil sorcerer has employed dark magick to set armies of fanatical apes -- including winged monkeys ala *The Wizard of Oz* -- upon the nations of man. This sorcerer uses "taint," a corrupted form of essence, to cast twisted invocations. Just three of these are detailed, and the Ape Master can create more based upon these or turn to other Unisystem games for more. The final Apeworld is "Primal Ape" in which humans and apes have evolved in parallel -- the apes on land and humans in the seas. The two have clashed recently as the humans move out of their swamp and river-delta homes, but they must also deal with the dinosaurs, as they never died out! In places the art does not match this Apeworld; it is stressed throughout *Terra Primate* that apes lack the natural buoyancy to be able to float, and therefore fear bodies of water . . . so depictions of swimming apes is very much at odds with this. Otherwise, this Apeworld, with its mixture of apes, humans, and dinosaurs could be expanded upon by the Ape Master as a setting threatened by commercial exploitation. Statistics for dinosaurs, as well as other creatures, are listed in the appendix, and every entry includes a note of which Apeworld that beast is best suited for.

It cannot be denied that the primates hold a certain fascination or even resonance for us. This may be due to how close we are on the evolutionary tree -- men and apes are both primates, after all -- thus making them the easiest of species to anthropomorphize. Or it may be because of how far the original *Planet of the Apes* has seeped into popular culture -- witness the number of references made in *The Simpsons* and the suggested gag made during astronaut John Glenn's shuttle flight. This may mean that apes should hold as strong an attraction to gamers as zombies do, which explains why *Terra Primate* is so closely modeled upon the format of *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*. Though in comparison the Apeworlds of *Terra Primate* lack the apocalyptic finality of the various Deadworlds in *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*. The Apeworlds in *Terra Primate* certainly showcase the possibilities of the genre, but leave room for them to be expanded upon while also giving ideas that might lead to many others. Other RPGs have included apes as part of their setting, but *Terra Primate* allows our simian cousins to stand on their own two feet -- and let them drag their knuckles if they want to.

--Matthew Pook

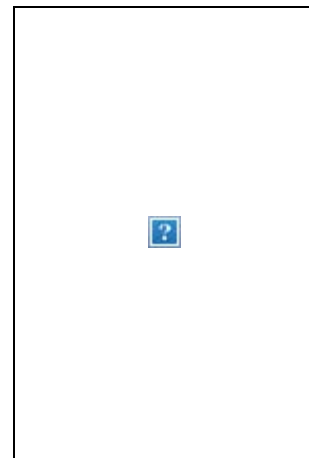
Pyramid Review

Knots

Published by [Jolly Games](#)

Designed by Tom Jolly

4-piece jigsaw-cut board, 36 color tiles; \$11.00



Sometimes a new game is really an old game with a new twist. Certainly there are plenty of twists in Jolly Games' *Knots* -- that's where it gets its name. From the people who brought you *Wiz War* comes another low-cost darling.

The product bears similarities to games like the old Avalon Hill puzzler *Twixt*, where a player had to build a line of pegs and accompanying crossbeams from one side of the board to the other before the opponent's play did the same (or blocked you from doing so); and the Piatnik/Rio Grande entry *Toscana* that requires two players to build the largest contiguous area of their tile color.

In *Knots*, the board consists of 36 floor spaces, six on a side. There are 36 tiles depicting a set of ropes left lying about on the floor. These fit together geomorphically, with some ropes stretching straight across the tile, some twisting to the left or right, and some ending in frayed tips. They may cross over each other, split into two directions, or curve back on themselves. Laid out on the board, they'll begin forming patterns.

Both players are given a hand of three tiles, and the rest are turned upside down in a deck (actually you can just as well leave them in a big pile -- it's easier to start the next game, and it's not like anyone is going to memorize them all). Players take turns placing them on the board, trying to get a continuous line of rope to traverse from one side to the other. Once you play a piece from your hand, you replace it with another from the deck. The trouble is, since all of the tiles have a tangle of twine leading in many directions, the path you build may unwittingly provide your opponent with a bit of progress as he attempts to stretch rope perpendicular to yours.

Players need not connect the tiles in any kind of order. You don't have to start at an edge if you're confident you can win by starting from the center of the board, and tiles don't have to be placed adjacent to previous plays. Ties (pun unintentional) are possible; if this happens, players have the option of taking turns rotating tiles a quarter-turn until a complete rope falls into place.

Games take about five minutes to begin with, though this can stretch into longer games as players get a feel for how the game plays and begin to consider their moves more carefully. Although it's unlikely you'll ever be in the driver's seat as far as getting all those loose strands completely under control, you and your partner can definitely affect each other. At first it looks like a haphazard mess that's as much dumb luck as it is skill, but it quickly becomes apparent that judicious use of certain tiles can benefit you or cripple your adversary's play handily. Allowing players a hand of tiles, but only a small hand, throws the game's delicate strategy of balancing progress and obstruction into sharp relief.

The publishers have made some strange production choices. Although the top cover is in full-color, the box is cheap cardboard (and that back-cover blurb, in case you're wondering, is held on only by the shrink-wrap). The wooden floorboard design on the board is nice, but the boards themselves warp a bit (though not enough to hurt game play, fortunately). The rope tiles are also pleasantly presented, though they're clearly not a pricey component. On the other hand, the company chose to go to the expense of providing a small cloth bag in which to store the tiles . . . big enough for the tiles but not for the board sections, so the bag is no replacement for the box.

The graphic design isn't complicated, but the artwork is something of a throwback. Apparently painted rather than drawn, it suggests parlor games and the board illustrations of older childhood favorites. The strands of rope may be

hard for the players to unravel, but it won't be from a lack of good visual presentation.

Already the game has errata, but a small card included with the game covers that. Readers will suss it out for themselves as soon as they read the rules, and since the instructions run all of half a page plus diagrams, it's more of a quality issue than a playability concern. Although somewhat derivative, *Knots* is an entertaining and engaging game, and lends itself to brief but challenging bouts that can be played out several times in a single lunch break when chess would just take too long.

--*Andy Vetromile*

The Car as the Star

Vehicles as Cybershells in *Transhuman Space*

by Phil Masters

As the *Transhuman Space* core book notes (p.TS121), there are literally thousands of different designs of cybershell available in the world of 2100; the templates in that book and in subsequent supplements can only scratch the surface of the subject. Strangely enough, though, *Transhuman Space* and *Fifth Wave* also describe a couple more potential cybershells, without defining them as such. This article covers that gap.

The point here is that virtually all *vehicles* in this setting have built in computer brains which are fully capable of running useful AIs -- even fully sapient mind emulations which could be used as PCs. Viewing a groundcar or aircar as a character may seem a little odd, but after all, there have been more than a few movies, TV series, and books which treat cars as central characters, giving them either "magical" intelligence or computer brains, so there's no reason why it shouldn't work in a game.

One way to handle vehicle computers in game terms *is* suggested in passing in the main *Transhuman Space* book; give the AI a Microframe cybershell and then buy the vehicle with cash as ordinary property. After all, the computer can always be unbolted and moved somewhere else. This works well enough for large vehicles such as spaceships, but some computers are inextricably part of the smaller vehicles in which they are installed -- and in any case, it's nice to have the option of playing a entire car as a character (or buying it with points as a faithful Programmed Ally).

However, while a car PC could well be fun, GMs should note, before permitting or encouraging the idea, that cars are big and cumbersome when compared to human beings, and can't get into some nightclubs. (They also have a very high point costs.) Vehicular PCs are likely to do best in campaigns focussing very much on life on the open road (or similar), possibly with *just* vehicle PCs. It would also be possible to run a PC infomorph with a car as one of several "vessels," others of which are smaller and more agile, or to play a car which teleoperates one or more smaller cybershells when necessary. For that matter, a PC vehicle could have a couple of small maintenance cybershells as Programmed Allies (p.TS130).

Also, a human (or similar size) PC could take a car as a Programmed Ally, or a team could share the cost of such an "assistant" between them. This should work, and indeed makes perfect sense; an "adventurer" or team might well have a personal vehicle with a high-quality, well-trained AI, quick to anticipate his or their needs and perhaps able to swoop in for the odd daring rescue. That said, players and GMs should note that merely owning a vehicle with an integral computer running an AI does not either imply or demand that it *has* to be a Programmed Ally. Most vehicle owners will regard their vehicle as interchangeable physical property.

To begin with, however, these designs need a couple of additional game features, to handle the sort of limitations from which they may suffer:

New Disadvantages

Limited Sense of Touch

-10 points

This disadvantage represents a unit whose body is a rigid shell with no contact sensors, and hence absolutely no sense of touch over most of its surface. The unit may have simple pressure-sensor "bumpers" to warn of collisions with solid objects, and will necessarily have some tactile feedback in any hands or other grippers (this being necessary for hands to be any real use at all), but even these are less sensitive than the human norm. The unit must make a sense roll to use

touch to determine even the general shape of something, and cannot discern subtleties of texture by feel (unless it has the Micromanipulators advantage, p.TS131). Many characters with this disadvantage also have Reduced Manual Dexterity (p.CI83) or Bad/Poor Grip (p.CI101), to represent general poor tactile and manipulative abilities.

This disadvantage doesn't grant immunity or insensitivity to *pain* -- no functional, self-aware being can entirely ignore physical damage -- although it's usually accompanied by a High Pain Threshold, which forms part of the Machine Body advantage (p.TS131). It is primarily designed to represent cybershells with plain metal casings, although it might also be used for alien biological races with hard, insensitive shells or carapaces, or even humans suffering from obscure (and dangerous) neurological problems.

Characters with a Limited Sense of Touch will of course realize that they are in physical contact with an object if they find their movement blocked, even without a "bumper" being contacted. They may also very well be able to see a thing touching them, or hear an impact and deduce the significance of the sound.

*Note: Logically, one might expect some existing cybershell templates to include this disadvantage. However, there are ways to rationalize and justify its omission in most cases. Smart matter (p.TS73) is widely available in the **Transhuman Space** world, and a cheap "passive" version could be used to provide a basic sense of touch for even low-cost 'shells. And yes, even cheap desktop microframe units could be given contact-sensitive casings; after all, it might well be useful for such a computer to know when it's being handled or moved. Still, this disadvantage could reasonably be added to units with the Microframe, Mainframe, or Macroframe cybershell templates, with GM permission. Just remember that such a cybershell has **no** idea of what's happening around it, unless it can see or hear what's going on, and may suffer all sorts of minor inconveniences at the GM's whim.*

Restricted Movement (Wheels/Tracks)

-15 or -25 points

This represents the practical problems encountered by any mechanical character who gets around on the ground on simple wheels or fairly crude tracks. (Note that *some* wheeled or tracked units may have sophisticated, versatile chassis designs which mean that they have no serious mobility problems compared to normal, legged humans.) It comes in two levels:

Somewhat Restricted Movement: This represents a unit with some "off road" capability, perhaps from tracks or large wheels, but nothing like as good as a legged robot or human being. The unit can handle shallow steps and obstructions up to 1/3 its own height, although it may bog down in mud or snow. It can ascend shallow staircases (although the GM may rule that it is vulnerable to being pushed or knocked back while doing so), but not ladders. It can also turn in its own length, or at least by rotating round one wheel, as it can vary the power going to different wheels quite freely. It suffers a -1 penalty to both attack and defense rolls in melee combat (except for slam attempts), due to restricted agility. **-15 points.**

Very Restricted Movement: This represents a unit which is only designed to move around on smooth, flat surfaces -- say, good, "made-up" roads, or the floor of a laboratory. It can't handle steps or even simple obstructions more than 1/4 its own height, and it will *rapidly* bog down in mud or snow. It also suffers a -3 penalty to both attack and defense rolls in melee combat (apart from slam attempts), due to poor agility, and -2 to rolls to resist being pushed or knocked back, due to poor traction. At the GM's option, it may move at a fraction of its normal rate in "off-road" conditions; see the rules for vehicles with ground pressure problems in **GURPS Vehicles** if you want details. It also requires space equal to *at least* its own length or width (whichever is greater) in which to turn around. **-25 points.**

Characters with either level of this disadvantage cannot take Acrobatics skill at all, and can only take Climbing if they have arms with ST equal to at least 1/10 their weight in pounds, in which case they still suffer a -3 penalty to all uses of the skill. They can only "jump" by running up a suitable ramp or similar at high speed; GMs will have to rule on the problems and dangers this involves. The disadvantage *cannot* generally be taken if the character can fly -- there's no great problem being restricted in one's ground movement if one can simply fly over any obstacles. (GMs may optionally make an exception for flying characters with high stall speeds or severely limited flight endurance, who thus have to spend most of their time on the ground.)

Note that the disadvantage still permits the character to move at full normal speed (under good conditions); it may be associated with Reduced Move (p.TS103), but it may equally well be associated with *high* ground speeds.

Sample Vehicular Cybershell Packages

The following are based on vehicle designs which have appeared in past *Transhuman Space* books, for ease of reference. With modular design systems for various types of vehicle appearing in several upcoming books in the line, coming up with more should be quite straightforward.

Smartcar

964 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +240 (No fine manipulators, -40%) [171]; HT +2 [20].

Advantages: Absolute Direction (Uses GPS, -20%) [4]; DR 5 [15]; Extra Encumbrance [5]; Extra Hit Points +119 [595]; Filter Lungs (Affects others +40%; Only works for passengers, -20%) [6]; Infravision [15]; Machine Body [37]; Night Vision [10]; Passive Defense +3 [75]; Penetrating Vision (actually millimetric radar: Blocked by metal -30%, Low-res imaging only -20%) [5]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Polarized Eyes [5]; Radio Speech [25]; Super Running x4 [80]; Telescopic Vision x1 [6].

Disadvantages: Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size (Large) [-10]; Limited Sense of Touch [-10]; Mistaken Identity [-5]; No Manipulators [-50]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Very Restricted Movement (Wheels/Tracks) [-25].

Features: Complexity 5-7 small computer. Internal space (room for four passengers plus luggage).

Date: c.2055 **Cost:** \$23,625 + computer.

This design is based on the vehicle in *Fifth Wave* (p.FW131). Civilian vehicles are designed to run for long periods with amateur or no servicing, so there is no relevant Dependency in its disadvantage list, but some older or more heavily modified models may gain this sort of problem. 1,650 lbs. unladen, 9' long.

Variations: A purely electrically powered design (such as the Ground Car on p.TS193) might have a similar package, but with Doesn't Breathe instead of Filter Lungs, and Limited Endurance (p.TS134 -- usually at the -10 point level) to reflect strictly finite battery life. *Some* designs might extend the former advantage to cover the passengers, if they have a sealed compartment and an air supply; this would be especially appropriate, especially if combined with a lower level of the Restricted Movement disadvantage, for vehicles operating on Mars or Luna.

Off-Road Vehicle

3507 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +640 (No fine manipulators, -40%) [291]; HT +2 [20].

Advantages: Absolute Direction (Uses GPS, -20%) [4]; DR 8 [24]; Extra Encumbrance [5]; Extra Hit Points +588 [2940]; Filter Lungs (Affects others +40%; Only works for passengers, -20%) [6]; Infravision (Front quarter only -20%) [12]; Machine Body [37]; Night Vision [10]; Passive Defense +3 [75]; Penetrating Vision (actually millimetric radar: Blocked by metal -30%, Front quarter only -20%, Low-res imaging only -20%) [3]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Polarized Eyes [5]; Radar Sense, 5 hex/mile range (Imaging and low-res modes +50%, Front quarter only -20%) [71]; Radio Speech [25]; Super Running x3 [60]; Telescopic Vision x4 (Front quarter only, -20%) [19].

Disadvantages: Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size (Large) [-10]; Limited Sense of Touch [-10]; Mistaken Identity [-5]; No Manipulators [-50]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Somewhat Restricted Movement (Wheels/Tracks) [-15].

Features: Complexity 5-7 small computer. Internal space (seats for four passengers plus cargo).

Date: c.2055 **Cost:** \$79,020 + computer.

This design is based on the Alvarez "Oruga" in *Fifth Wave*, p.FW130. Variants on this template might be used to represent a wide range of rugged utility vehicles, some possibly with built-in Weaponry (p.TS132). Again, actual maintenance requirements are assumed to be low, though some designs and older vehicles might add a Dependency to reflect the need for more frequent servicing. (Any vehicle *might* have such problems, but off-road models, however robust, tend to suffer the worst batterings.) 6,200 lbs. unladen, 13' long.

Air Car

940 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST +190 (No fine manipulators, -40%) [156]; HT +1 [10].

Advantages: Absolute Direction (Uses GPS, -20%) [4]; DR 5 [15]; Extra Encumbrance [5]; Extra Hit Points +83 [415]; Filter Lungs (Affects Others, +40%; Only works for passengers, -20%) [6]; Flight (Limited use: 6 hours) [36]; Increased Speed x1 [25]; Infravision [15]; Machine Body [37]; Night Vision [10]; Passive Defense +3 [75]; Penetrating Vision (actually millimetric radar: Blocked by metal -30%, Low-res imaging only -20%) [5]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Polarized Eyes [5]; Radar Sense, 5 hex/mile range (Imaging and low-res modes +50%) [82]; Radio Speech [25]; Super Flight x4 [80]; Telescopic Vision x4 [24].

Disadvantages: Dependency (Maintenance: common, monthly) [-5]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size (Large) [-10]; Limited Sense of Touch [-10]; Mistaken Identity [-5]; No Manipulators [-50]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10].

Features: Complexity 5-7 small computer. Internal space (room for four passengers plus limited luggage).

Date: c.2065 **Cost:** \$98,000 + computer.

This design is based on the standard air car from the *Transhuman Space* core book (p.TS193). Note that, although it has an endurance of only four hours at maximum speed, it can operate for somewhat longer than that at lower speeds, and the reserve battery can keep the on-board computer functioning for days. It has air-breathing engines, and this treatment assumes that it is restricted to fairly low altitudes; a version capable of using the very thin atmosphere at high altitudes might replace Filter Lungs with Doesn't Breathe. 600 lbs. unladen, 15' long.

Further Notes

1. The Peripheral Vision advantage represents the fact that vehicles such as these have multiple small cameras mounted around the bodywork, enabling the controlling AI (or a human driver) to monitor events in all directions with ease. In fact, an AI *might* be able to monitor every camera at once, giving 360-degree Vision (+10 points to package costs); however, this would probably require specially enhanced visual processing subsystems, and hence would only be available to AIs specifically designed as vehicle controllers.
2. Information from a vehicle's sensors *may* be available to crew or passengers who can connect their personal interface systems to the vehicle (or just through screens). GMs who consider this important and worth charging for may add a net +20% enhancement (Affects others, Passengers/crew only) to each sense-related advantage.
3. The vehicles' internal carrying space is considered a "feature" here. GMs who feel that it should cost points might treat it as the Flesh Pockets advantage (p.TS131), but as it isn't concealed, this seems excessive.
4. Obviously, many variant designs are possible. Not only could vehicle shells have greater or lesser ST ratings, hit point totals, and DR (representing varying sizes, load-carrying capacities, and body shell strengths), but some could drop Limited Sense of Touch (representing advanced smart matter bodywork, for owners who want their vehicle AIs to be able to park in the smallest spaces with startling delicacy). Minor variations in HT are also

possible, to represent better or more rugged frames and generally superior construction, although at the prevailing Tech Level of *Transhuman Space*, no vehicle can have a HT higher than 12. Using one of the modular vehicle design systems mentioned above will produce a design fully compatible with the setting's technological assumptions.

5. For that matter, offbeat designs could drop Mistaken Identity (for unique "custom jobs"), or No Sense of Smell/Taste (there must be *some* use to chemosensors fitted to cars). Liquid crystal coatings could give Chameleon. Obviously, such additions and variations will tend to add to the cash cost of the vehicle.
6. Robotic vehicles are deeply familiar in 2100, and people tend to trust them implicitly. It would be quite plausible to add Sanctity to at least the first of the templates above...
7. The total hit points for these templates are based on the *body* hit points for the vehicle in question. GMs and players who wish to get into the detail of damage to wheels and other external components can consult the notes on these designs in the original books.

Sample Vehicular AI Systems

These are basic, serviceable AIs of the sort which are available "off the shelf" to go with new vehicles. PCs who want personalized Programmed Ally vehicles will almost certainly want something a little more, well, *personal* -- but they could reasonably take these systems as a basis, and add skills to reflect individual training and experience for the AI.

Groundcar NAI

-11 points

Disadvantages: NAI-5 (gives IQ 9) [-20].

Quirks: Obeys the law by default. [-1]

Skills: Computer Operation-12 [0]; Driving (Automobile)-12* [8]; Law (specialized in Traffic Laws)-6/12 [1]; Orienteering-8 [1]. *Assumes a DX 10 cybershell.

Cost: \$1,500.

This is the kind of system which is commonplace for standard smartcars. Its capabilities reflect the basic legal requirements for automated vehicle operations in most Fourth and Fifth Wave countries -- in summary, that the AI should be able to operate the vehicle safely at speed and operate its electronic systems and sensors.

Such systems also have a strong innate tendency to obey the local traffic laws -- a "habit" introduced by programmers in response to years of legal pressure, liability suits, and pressure group chivying. As an NAI, the system also has a Reprogrammable Duty to whoever holds its control codes, which can be used to override this "inclination" -- but it will protest and quibble all the way, insofar as a non-sapient entity can argue, and an official investigator who subsequently obtains its control codes will easily be able to get it to give evidence against its owner. Deleting its recordings of such infractions is possible, but takes more technical skill than most owners possess, especially if they wish to make the fact of the tinkering hard to detect.

While its Driver skill is highly adequate, players may feel that it is rather low for a program which may be required to operate a smartcar at 140 mph. They should note, however, that as a NAI, the system has Single-Minded, indicating a capacity for concentration greater than most human drivers, and Enhanced Time Sense, enabling it to respond to most emergencies promptly and smoothly.

Off-Road Ops LAI

61 points

Advantages: LAI-6 (gives IQ 9) [40].

Skills: Computer Operation-12 [0]; Driving (All-Terrain Vehicle)-13* [16]; Electronics Operation (Communications)-8 [1]; Electronics Operation (Sensors)-8 [1]; Law (specialized in Traffic Laws)-6/12 [1]; Orienteering-9 [2].

*Assumes a DX 10 cybershell.

Cost: \$7,100.

This is a rather more sophisticated ground vehicle AI, intended for installation in civilian vehicles working in unknown or dangerous terrain. It can get an off-road vehicle to a destination with minimal human intervention, and will sometimes display some initiative in the process. There are actually rather more programs of this type in use on Mars than on Earth, although counting very similar systems running on light military vehicles would probably more than tip the balance the other way.

Autopilot NAI

3 points

Disadvantages: NAI-5 (gives IQ 9) [-20].

Quirks: Obeys the law by default. [-1]

Skills: Aviation-9 [2]; Computer Operation-12 [0]; Electronics Operation (Communications)-9 [2]; Electronics Operation (Sensors)-9 [2]; Navigation-8* [2]; Piloting (any one specialization)-13** [16].

*Will receive a +3 bonus for Absolute Direction in virtually all vehicular cybershells. **Assumes a DX 10 cybershell.

Cost: \$2,900.

This is in some ways the aviation equivalent of the groundcar NAI above, but more to the point, it is the refined and reliable product of over a century of autopilot development. Very similar models are used in a wide range of aircars and aircraft -- hence the wide choice of skill specialties.

However, although they are fully capable of handling an aircraft from start to finish of a journey, often better than many part-time human pilots (at least if nothing unexpected occurs), programs of this type are mostly used for holding air vehicles on level, steady courses, and are firmly instructed to request intervention if the slightest unexpected event occurs. While most people in 2100 have complete, habitual confidence in automated systems, many still prefer that life and death decisions be passed to somewhat sapient entities, if time permits. The widespread availability and fairly low cost of LAI systems means that this habit (or prejudice) is seen as quite tolerable, even by those who do not share it.

Pilot LAI

79 points

Advantages: LAI-6 (gives IQ 9) [40].

Skills: Aviation-10 [4]; Computer Operation- 12 [0]; Electronics Operation (Communications)-10 [4]; Electronics Operation (Sensors)-10 [4]; Navigation-8* [2]; Piloting (any one specialization)-14** [24]; Savoir-Faire (Servant)-9 [1].

*Will receive a +3 bonus for Absolute Direction in virtually all vehicular cybershells. **Assumes a DX 10 cybershell.

Cost: \$8,900.

When civilian air vehicle owners are looking for automated systems to fly them around full time, this is the type of system they usually favor (probably with an NAI autopilot as backup). While no more skilled than many professional human pilots, it is very capable, and its capacity for concentration, immunity to drowsiness, and situational modeling ("Visualization") abilities make it extremely effective. It knows how to be polite, too.

Most such systems learn a few additional skills over time -- if only Area Knowledge of their owner's preferred routes -

- and many seem to develop distinctive personalities. However, the latter is actually *mostly* a result of feedback processes coded into the AI; wealthy owners expect some kind of conversational feedback from their AIs, and the AIs obligingly respond after developing a model of their owner's responses.

Example Vehicle Character: "Harold" (1095 points)

ST 250 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 10 [10]; **HT** 12/131 [0].

Advantages: Ally (Salvatore Cadalso: 150 points, appears 15-) [30]; Ally Group ("housemates": five 100 point characters, appear 12-) [40]; SAI-7 [65]; Smartcar [964].

Disadvantages: Chummy [-5]; Dependence (Maintenance; common, weekly) [-10]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Pacifism (Cannot kill) [-15].

Quirks: Evolving a dry sense of humor; Indiscriminate consumer of broadcast entertainment; Likes cats, unless they make messes on "his" upholstery; Obliging. [-4]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Madison)-11 [2]; Area Knowledge (USA)-9 [1/2]; Bartender-9 [1]; Carousing-10 [1/2]; Computer Operation-13 [0]; Driving (Automobile)-13 [16]; Electronics Operation (Communications)-9 [1]; Electronics Operation (Robotics)-10 [2]; Games (InVid Games)-11 [2]; Law (specialized in Traffic Laws)-7/13 [1]; Orienteering-10 [2].

Languages: English (native)-10 [0]; Spanish-10 [2].

Background

"Harold" is the product of a research project at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where Salvatore Cadalso, a graduate student of robotics engineering, somehow obtained, not only permits to develop some of his department's sapient- grade AI templates and legacy code into a full program, but also a grant to support the work. Salvaging an old, damaged smartcar shell from somewhere, and performing *just* enough maintenance to render it street legal again, Cadalso has spent two years so far on his masterpiece. However, despite the fact that he has the thing up to full functionality, Cadalso's perfectionist streak prevents him from declaring the task anywhere near complete, especially as the grant still has two years to run, and somehow he has convinced his supervisors to permit him to "finish the job properly" -- despite the fact that the "project" has three thousand miles on the clock and is becoming a familiar site around the university. In truth, Cadalso couldn't bring himself to make radical modifications to his new friend's personality these days, although he is doing interesting work on its operational interfaces.

Harold is now part of the household in which Cadalso lives, along with a number of other individuals more or less associated with the university, or just unwilling to leave. (While on-site residence is no longer considered obligatory for most such educational institutions, there are somehow always some reasons for some people to live on or near a campus.) Harold has become something of a group mascot, as well as providing them with transport, and the fact that "he" is probably technically the university's property somehow seems to have been forgotten. Whether "he" is worth the trouble of "his" continuing maintenance requirements and running costs to the group might be an open question, but they have become very attached to "him."

It is also an open question how commercially useful this project will ever be, although it is certainly may prove interesting to AI researchers on a technical level (and may one day be documented as some kind of horrible warning). Cadalso claims in his progress reports that one of his intentions is to test the possibility of "socializing" technically-oriented SAI personalities by extended exposure to human interaction. What this means in practice is that the car gets to join in many of the household's activities; thanks to some "experiments" which Cadalso is conducting with small teleoperated cybershells, Harold is even learning how to mix drinks. Still, Harold *has* developed a personality which enables "him" to fit in well with the people around him; very good natured and respectful of others, sociable, obliging, and always willing to throw himself into something new -- usually only metaphorically . . .

Note: For a version of Harold with a more normal character point total, replace the Smartcar cybershell advantage with a Microframe (p.TS122), and drop the Dependency on maintenance (which is a problem of the vehicle body, not the brain). This gives ST --, DX 10, IQ 10, HT 12/8, and a points total of 87. This version of Harold usually lives in the boot of the car, plugged into its sensor and control systems, but can be unplugged and moved around in a large case if he wants to go to parties in "person."